



The Blue Star Memorial Marker Program

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

(including the development of the program
in the State of Florida)

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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 and includes the implementation of the program in Florida.

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.

From 2015-2019, while serving as Florida's Blue Star Memorial Chairman, the very abundant guidance, inspiration and support generously provided to me 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 including the Florida Federation.

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



Mrs. Lewis M. Hull

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



Mrs. Vance R. Hood

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 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 abroad.

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 abroad.

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 above) 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 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 Edisons 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."



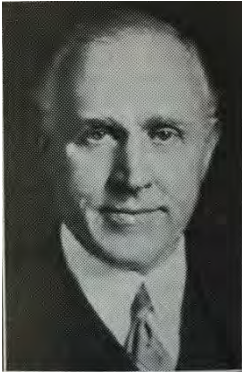
The cover page of the February, 1945 *BULLETIN* featured a copy of the cover of the Blue Star Drive brochure used by the Garden Club of New Jersey as part of the promotional campaign for their memorial highway initiative. And, the same issue of the *BULLETIN* included a three-page article by Mrs. Vance 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 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”.

Spencer Miller, Jr.

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. William 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. Florida Considers Blue Star Memorial Highway Program

The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (FFGC) President Mrs. Merle B. Mann responded positively to Mrs. Vance R. Hood's December 28th, 1945 letter asking the FFGC to join the Blue Star Highway memorialization and beautification movement. Mrs. Mann was also able to confirm that the State Road Department of Florida had indicated willingness to cooperate. However, three concerns were raised.

First, the map that Mrs. Hood had initially shared showed that the north-south tributary route involving US Highway 1 would be terminating at Daytona Beach. Both the FFGC and the State Road Department of Florida felt that the length of US 1 from the Georgia state line should be designated at least as far south as Miami "due to all the historic points of interest along that stretch" of the highway. Mrs. Hood concurred, and apparently with input from Maine, it was decided that the entire length of US 1 from northern Maine to Key West would be authorized within the scope of the Blue Star Memorial Highway project.

Second, Mrs. Mann asserted that the FFGC would like to proceed as soon as possible after designating US 1 to add an east-west route across Florida. Both proposals were intended to be able to involve more garden clubs in the Blue Star project, especially many of the larger clubs.

The third challenge the FFGC had to overcome was that prior to the advent of the Blue Star Memorial Program the State Road Department of Florida had, by resolution, already named US 1 as “The Presidential Highway”. Fortunately, the FFGC later determined that any legislation passed by Florida’s legislature would take precedence over the Road Department’s naming designations.

By mid-1946 Mrs. Merle B. Mann appointed a committee of six “representing all parts of the state” to report on the Blue Star Memorial project to the FFGC’s November, 1946 Board meeting. This committee was led by Mrs. Karl A. Bickel (Madira), who became FFGC President from 1947-1949. Also involved were Mrs. Brink, Legislative Chairman and Mrs. Vinton, Roadside Development Chairman.

5. 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.

6. Florida Legislature Passes Blue Star Memorial Highway Bill

Meanwhile, in Florida the FFGC's Blue Star Memorial Committee had proposed to the FFGC Board that U.S. Highway 1 from the Georgia line all the way to Key West be designated as a Blue Star Memorial Highway following the lead of Georgia which had already selected the length of US 1 within their state's boundaries as its Blue Star Memorial Highway. The FFGC Board approved the recommendation and voted to secure the introduction into the Florida Legislature of a Joint Resolution to this effect. Florida State Senator Walter B. Fraser of St. Johns County agreed to introduce this Resolution to the 1947 Florida Legislature. The Resolution passed both the Florida Senate and the House. As a result the "Blue Star Highway Bill" was finally passed by the Florida Legislature on May 12th, 1947 (a year almost to the day after Rhode Island did the same) confirming the entire length of US 1 as Florida's first "Blue Star Drive as a memorial in commemoration

of the services of the men and women of Florida who served in the Armed Forces of the United States in World War II". This bill also officially gave the State Road Department the authority to oversee the naming of highways subject to the Department subsequently advising Florida's Secretary of State in each case.

In the spring of 1947 at the FFGC's annual convention the Board of Directors decided that their Chairmanship of Roadside Development was to be expanded to include Blue Star Memorial Highways and Mrs. C. Verne Klintworth (Sue), from Tampa assumed this newly expanded chairmanship.

7. Program Develops and Expands Nationally Through 1949

At the May 6th, 1947 NCSGC annual meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma Helen S. Hull, co-ordinator 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".

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 on previous page.)



At the October, 1948 NCSGC semi-annual board meeting in Tucson, Arizona a Certificate of Merit (pictured at left) was awarded to twenty-three state federations, including Florida, 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 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.

8. Florida's First Few Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers

Despite the uncertainty of the roadwork and route configuration on US 1 in Florida, there were a few locations where new plantings were less likely to be impacted. These included sites such as at the entrance to the state, at established wayside parks and at the southern end US 1. Therefore, it is not surprising that Florida's first Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker was placed at the terminus of U.S. Highway 1 at Bay View Park in Key West and was dedicated on Memorial Day (May 30th) of 1949.

The original marker (pictured at the dedication ceremony below) subsequently suffered considerable weathering and some damage due to hurricanes passing through the Florida Keys. The Key West Garden Club removed the original marker, put it in storage, and replaced it with a new one which also was eventually replaced once again in 2015. However, in 1980 the Key West Garden Club gifted the historic original marker to the Miami Beach Garden Club which had the marker repainted and erected it near the terminus of the Julia Tuttle Causeway terminus in Miami Beach. The Miami Beach Garden Club replaced this marker with a new one. The club plans to display the historic Key West marker permanently in a new Veterans Memorial Plaza in Miami Beach which is expected to be completed in 2022 or thereafter.





Florida's second marker was dedicated on March 17th, 1950 at a wayside park along US 1 just north of St. Augustine by the former NCSGC President Helen Hull of New Jersey who, again, was one of the original founders of the original Blue Star Memorial concept (see photo at left). Additionally participating in the dedication ceremony were Mary Compton, FFGC President, Madira Bickel, former FFGC President

and Pearl Trafford, FFGC Blue Star Chairman. It was at this ceremony when U.S. Highway 1 was formally dedicated as Florida's first Blue Star Memorial Highway. The historic original marker located in St. Augustine still exists as pictured at right.



On Friday, May 25th, 1951 three more Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers in Florida, along with their living memorial gardens, were all dedicated *on the same day*. One was in Rockledge and two in Melbourne – all within a 25 mile stretch of US 1. These three were the only markers dedicated that year in Florida

On November 28th, 1952 Florida's 6th Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker was dedicated on the grounds of the Welcome Station along US 1 near the Georgia state line by the Garden Club of Jacksonville.

The "Blue Star Memorial Flag" (of Pima cotton) used in the marker's unveiling was loaned by the National Council of State Garden Clubs for the occasion. In attendance was Mrs. W.E. MacArthur, FFGC Blue Star Chairman and Jacksonville resident. The original 1952 marker



was replaced many years later with a post-Vietnam era marker (pictured above) with a unique and special reference to the POW-MIA veterans.

This newer marker was placed in the median of US 1 just south of the Florida/Georgia border. Unfortunately, this replacement marker, pictured on the previous page, went missing in 2014.

9. 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 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 new 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.

10. Florida Expansion of the Blue Star Highway Network

Due primarily to the uncertainties of the roadwork along US 1 in Florida only nine Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers were dedicated in the first seven years of the adoption of the program by the FFGC.

At the FFGC Board meeting in Sebring on October 13th, 1954 a resolution proposed by District V was adopted by the FFGC Executive Board to petition the State Road Department to expand the Blue Star Memorial Highway network beyond US 1 forming a continuous route encircling the state to include federal U.S. highways 19, part of 27, 41, and US 90 (the Old Spanish Trail) from Jacksonville to the Alabama state line.

In September of 1954 the newly constructed Sunshine Skyway Bridge over the entry to Tampa Bay had been officially opened connecting St. Petersburg with Manatee County and Sarasota. On June 15th, 1955 the route from Miami to St. Petersburg and further north to Capps (near Tallahassee and US 90) along US 41, 19 and 27 was designated by the Florida legislature as Blue Star Memorial Highways.

On October 7th, 1957 at the request of the FFGC the Florida legislature added a segment of US 90 from near Tallahassee to the Florida/Alabama line as a designated Blue Star Memorial Highway.

After the relatively slow start with Blue Star Memorial dedications in Florida, momentum significantly changed during Mrs. George J. (Maud) Roark's initial term as FFGC Blue Star Chairman from 1957-1961. She successfully petitioned the State Road Department to memorialize the entire length of US 90, along with parts of US 92 and US 98. By the end of her term in 1961 a total of twenty-one additional markers were dedicated and Florida led all other states in the total number of Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers acquired and dedicated.

Following Mrs. Roark's example, for the next few decades the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs usually maintained its lead position countrywide among all states as respects creating living memorial gardens identified by the Blue Star Memorial markers.

Maud Clark Roark lived in Pensacola; a community noted for its military heritage. Her husband, George James Roark, was Pensacola's first City Manager from 1931-1948. He was also a Captain in U.S. Army who served in Italy from 1943-1945. Mrs. Roark was quite instrumental in developing a strong working relationship between the Florida Legislature, the Florida State Road Department and the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. During her tenure Florida's Blue Star Memorial Highways Act became a permanent part of the state's law.



Mrs. George J. Roark

Mrs. Roark enlisted the assistance of State Senator Phillip D. Beall, Jr. and State Representative J.B. Hopkins, both of Pensacola, to steer the legislation first through the State Senate and then through the State House of Representatives.

On May 21st, 1959 Florida Governor T. Leroy Collins signed Chapter 59-77 House Bill No. 64 which was an Act authorizing the Chairman of the State Road Department of Florida, in cooperation with the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., to designate certain roads and highways as portions of the Blue Star Memorial Highway system. The actual Bill reads as follows:

CHAPTER 59-77

HOUSE BILL No. 64

AN ACT authorizing the chairman of the State Road Department of Florida, in cooperation with the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., to designate certain roads and highways as portions of the Blue Star Memorial Highway; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, members of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., following the precept of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, are desirous of recognizing and commemorating the valorous services and achievements of their sons and daughters who serve, have served or will serve in the armed forces of the United States, and

WHEREAS, designating a highway "Blue Star Memorial" in no way changes, alters or interferes with any previous name or number the highway may have, and

WHEREAS, it is fitting and appropriate that the legislative recognition be accorded the services of all citizens so valiantly rendered, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be it Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. The Chairman of the State Road Department of Florida, in cooperation with the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., is hereby authorized to designate certain roads and highways in Florida as "Blue Star Memorial Highway".

Section 2. It shall be the duty of the executive board of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., to submit to the Chairman of the State Road Department routes on certain roads and highways in the state to be designated Blue Star Memorial Highway. Upon such designation, member clubs of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., may, with the advice, cooperation and approval of the State Road Department, erect suitable markers and beautify said memorial highway.

Section 3. The Chairman of the State Road Department of Florida shall file with the Secretary of State a record of such roads and highways so designated as Blue Star Memorial Highway.

Section 4. This act shall take effect immediately upon its becoming law.

Approved by the Governor May 21, 1959

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 21, 1959

The subsequent law approved by the Florida Legislature, and which became Section 335.091 of the Florida Statutes, confirmed the authorization of the FFGC to erect suitable markers and beautify said highways. The Statute reads as follows:

Florida Statutes

Chapter: 335; Section: 091

335.091 Blue Star Memorial Highway designation.—

(1) The head of the department, in cooperation with the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., is authorized to

designate certain roads in this state as Blue Star Memorial highways in honor of those individuals who have served or are serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

(2) It is the duty of the executive board of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., to submit to the head of the department routes on certain roads in the state for designation as Blue Star Memorial highways. Upon designation of a route as a “Blue Star Memorial Highway,” any member club of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., may, with the advice, cooperation, and approval of the department, erect suitable markers and beautify such memorial highway.

(3) The department shall file with the Department of State a record of such roads so designated as Blue Star Memorial highways.

11. Blue Star Highways versus National Interstate Highways

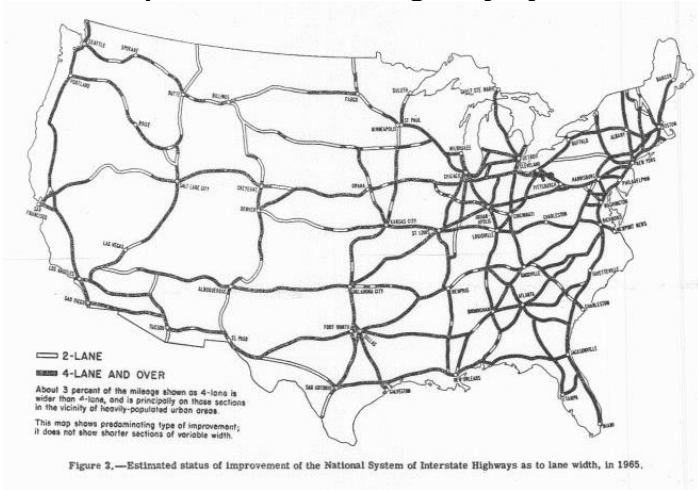
A major crisis arose in 1958 which potentially threatened the viability of the National Council of State Garden Clubs’ Blue Star Memorial Program. While serving as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower realized the strategic military importance 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 of 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 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 Florida, and perhaps elsewhere, the issue soon began to dissipate as the Chairman of the Florida 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, all 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.

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.

12. Blue Star Program Activities in Florida Through 1977

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 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 when, by then, the proposed change was authorized.

The first marker to use the four possible signature lines was for a highway marker dedicated on October 26th, 1960 in Perry, Florida as pictured above. In this instance 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).

The FFGC governs itself by means of a Charter or Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws and Policies. A further accomplishment of Blue Star Chairman Maud Roark was to encourage an addition to the FFGC’s key objectives as stipulated in its Articles of Incorporation. This addition was approved by the FFGC board and was adopted on April 14, 1961 at the FFGC’s Spring Annual Convention. The addition, in bold print below, remains in the FFGC Charter and Bylaws reading as follows:

Article II Objectives –

Specifically the purposes of the association are as follows:

- (b) To encourage the erection of memorials to veterans of the United States armed forces;**

By the time Maud Roark’s term as Blue Star Chairman came to a close in 1961 approximately 2,000 miles of highways encircling the state had been designated as Blue Star Memorial Highways. And, in 1961 the National Council of State Garden Clubs named

the Florida Federation as the winner of NGS GC award No. 29 A BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY CERTIFICATE OF MERIT. In 1959 District I Director Mrs. G. Durward Roberson (Dorothea) of Pensacola, sewed together an attractive drape specifically for use as an official unveiling cover at many of the Blue Star Memorial Highway marker dedication ceremonies. The cover featured the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' trademark logo. The background material was made of felt and required utmost care in handling and protection from rain to avoid permanent damage and serious shrinkage. Fortunately, all the garden clubs which used the cover over the years took reasonable care as this original unveiling cover is still available for use today.



Blue Star Drape (unveiling cover)

In 1961-62 a new FFGC Policy (#29) was added urging clubs to use the unveiling cover and read as follows:

“The official Blue Star Drape shall be used at the dedication of every Blue Star Marker. The Blue Star Drape shall be kept at The Headquarters building. The Headquarters Manager shall be responsible for its safe keeping and shall mail the Drape in a specially designed carton, by insured parcel post, upon request of bona fide borrowers. Requests for its use shall be made in writing to The Headquarters Manager at least two weeks in advance of the desired date. A deposit of ten dollars (\$10) shall be made for the loan of the Drape. When the Drape is returned in good condition, the deposit, less transportation costs, shall be returned to the borrower. The borrower shall be responsible for damage or soil. However, cleaning or repairs shall be done under the direction of The Headquarters Manager. CLUBS SHALL NOT HAVE THE DRAPE CLEANED. The Drape must be returned TWO days after its use by a

Club. Requests shall be addressed: Headquarters Manager, P.O. Box 1604, Winter Park, Florida.”

In 1962 FFGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Nicholas A. Tierney (Cecelia), in her report for the Book of Information (BOI), urged that in view of the critical days ahead (referring to the Cuban Missile Crisis taking the world to the brink of war) garden clubbers should “re-awaken themselves and the general public to a more patriotic attitude toward their own Country and the preservation of its freedom” by acquiring more Blue Star Markers, including having clubs and/or Circles joining together to do so if necessary. The report also mentioned that only Federal (U.S.) Highways may be designated “Blue Star”.

With 36 markers dedicated through the end of 1963 the state of Florida still led the nation in Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker dedications. (And, through 1970, Florida continued to lead with 76 markers in total involving about 2,280 miles of dedicated highways.)

For the 1963-64 BOI Mrs. Jack Dunlap (Hazel), FFGC Blue Star Chairman and future FFGC President, advised members that the “Marker is shipped direct to the Club two weeks after the order is placed with the Company” (Sewah Studios in Marietta, OH). Mrs. Dunlap further encouraged an “inspirational, dignified Dedication” using an “official drape from Headquarters (See Policy #29)”.

After the 1965-66 fiscal year the Unveiling Cover or Drape Policy was removed from the official FFGC Policies, but was thereafter mentioned in the FFGC Blue Star Memorial Marker Placing Guidelines issued by subsequent FFGC Blue Star Chairmen.

Following Mrs. Dunlap’s term as FFGC Blue Star Chairman, Maud Clark Roark took over the chairmanship, once again, for another two-year period (1965-67), during which 328 additional Florida highway miles were memorialized.

In her 1966-67 BOI Blue Star Memorial report Mrs. Roark advised, “Alternate Routes (of Federal Highways) may be memorialized when the main route is designated Blue Star”. She also cautioned

that the NCSGC approved conventional inscription engraved on the marker cannot be changed!

At the October 1st, 1968 FFGC Board of Directors meeting Mrs.



Earl W. Lau (Amy Marie) very proudly exhibited a new Blue Star Memorial marker unveiling drape/cover she had crafted. The original cover was more frequently being requested by two, or more clubs at the same time. During 1961-1963 Mrs. Lau was the FFGC 2nd

Vice President. Amy lived in Winter Park with her husband, Earl, who had served in World War II. (Mrs. Lau is on the right in the photo above.)

During her 1971-73 term, FFGC Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Rhett Enzor (Opal) wrote in the Blue Star Chairman's BOI report: "Simple landscaping, using native, drought resistant, low maintenance plant material is urged." By this time the state had dedicated 82 new markers since 1949, and the cost of the marker had risen to \$150.

The FFGC added a new District award in 1973 funded by the then serving Blue Star Chairman Mrs. Jack P. Monroe (Phyllis) from Pensacola. The award read as follows:

D-7. BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY MARKER

\$25 will be awarded to the District that erects the most Blue Star Memorial Highway Markers during the Calendar year 1974.

In 1974, driven by a period of high inflation, the cost of the marker increased to \$200 and only four Blue Star markers were dedicated - with two of them being in the city of Palatka, so District IV won the new award.

In 1975 the FFGC added a new award number 47. BLUE STAR MEMORIAL MARKER MAINTENANCE AWARD of \$25 to be

given to the club considered best at “maintaining or upgrading a Blue Star Marker area... that these areas may be worthy of honoring the men and women who have served, or are serving, in the Armed forces of the United States, to whom these areas are dedicated.”

In 1975 another Pensacola resident, Mrs. R.M. Pyle, Jr. (Emmergene), began a six-year term as FFGC Blue Star Chairman. In her report for the 1976-77 BOI she advised: “All US Highways in Florida have been memorialized and the entire Interstate System, including the Florida Turnpike (Sunshine Parkway) and Ives Dairy Road (CR 854), was memorialized last year and Markers may be placed at Rest Area Sites as approved by the District Maintenance Engineer. Some State Highways may be memorialized by special resolution.” This all resulted from the Florida legislature acting upon a resolution proposed by the FFGC. The Secretary of FDOT confirmed the designation of Florida’s Turnpike and the Interstate System as Blue Star Memorial Highways by a letter dated May 24, 1976, resulting in a total of over 6,200 memorialized miles in Florida to date.

Again, in 1975 Mrs. Pyle revised the District award D-7. BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAY MARKER to apply for a two year rather than one-year period. She also was the donor for this award for a number of years.

In 1977 Mrs. Pyle also updated the FFGC’s BLUE STAR MEMORIAL MARKER MAINTENANCE AWARD (now No. 43) to apply “to the club which accomplishes the most effective results by either relocation of a marker or the renewed landscaping of an existing marker.” Mrs. Pyle was the donor of this award for the next ten years.

Unfortunately, the Vietnam War undermined 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, he 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.

13. New By-Way and Memorial Markers Introduced

A movement to extend the Blue Star Memorial Highway program to accommodate memorial sites other than dedicated highways began 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 right. 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 above.



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 had 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.

14. Blue Star Marker Activity in Florida Wanes & Waxes

Between 1980 and 2000 only six new Blue Star Memorial Markers were acquired in Florida. This may, in part, have been due to the drop in patriotic sentiment following the Vietnam War. However, the introduction of a new type of memorial program in Florida may have diverted attention away from the Blue Star markers. An initiative marking the trails of naturalist William Bartram began by the FFGC and was endorsed by the Deep South Region of the NCSGC. Former FFGC President Van Blanchard designed a marker similar to the large Blue Star Markers. On October 8th, 1980 the first of at least twenty-five Bartram Trail Markers, which were acquired over the next few decades in Florida, was dedicated by the Pierson Garden Club.

On February 5th, 1980 the first club in Florida to acquire a BY-WAY MARKER #1, displaying the earliest official Blue Star Memorial By-Way marker design, was the Top of the Bay Garden Club in Oldsmar just one year after they had joined the FFGC.



In the November-December, 1989 edition of *The Florida Gardener* Emma Jeanne Painter, FFGC Blue Star Chairman, introduced a goal of “checking all markers to see that they are in first class condition”. She requested the District Directors be responsible for this task. It was also suggested that Florida’s State Wildflower (Coreopsis) be included in the plantings around each marker wherever possible.

In 1999 FFGC Blue Star Chairman Pat Grulke of Fort Myers, who had begun her tenure in this position in late 1997, urged Florida’s garden clubs to “concentrate for the next two years on refurbishing, replanting and rededicating those MARKERS already in place.”

For her 2001-03 term as FFGC Blue Star Chairman, Pat Grulke encouraged that “while still updating the MARKERS we need to find those markers that have gone missing.” She suggested first checking with the regional Florida Department of Transportation

offices which may have removed the marker for safekeeping during road work.

District III's Live Oak Garden Club dedicated the first Blue Star Memorial Marker in Florida in 2001 in small park in Live Oak.



First Memorial Marker in Florida (2001)

The FFGC's 2003-05 BOI introduced a revised No. 43 BLUE STAR MEMORIAL MARKER AWARD which included four sections, each of which was eligible for an award. All were for landscaping projects. The sections were: A – Highway; B – Memorial; C- By-way; D – Maintenance (of existing landscaping).

The 2005-09 FFGC Blue Star Chairman Carol Brown's write up in the BOI for 2005 proposed the following:

“Blue Star Marker Goals: Placing Markers in all districts, locating missing and replacing destroyed Markers and landscaping around existing Markers.”

During the 2009-2013 tenure of FFGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman Molly Tenney efforts were made to update the Florida listing of Blue Star Memorial Markers.

It was not until 2015 when FFGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman Rosita Aristoff began an exhaustive project to create a more accurate and complete database including more precise locations, with photographs, and with other relevant details. The current results of this ongoing project are now displayed on the FFGC's website. And this work led Rosita to eventually have the NGC Blue Star Memorial Chairman correct and update the Blue & Gold Star Memorial database maintained on the NGC's website in mid-2021.

Between January of 2015 and November of 2017, largely under the leadership of FFGC President Arlene Rand, a number of garden club Districts in Florida completed the placing of a Blue Star Memorial Marker at all nine of Florida's national cemeteries. Through the facilitation of then FFGC 1st Vice President Claudia Bates seven of these markers were funded by a grant from the Florida State Elks Association. The FFGC is one of the few state federations to have dedicated Blue Star Memorial Markers at all of their national cemeteries. There are 152 national cemeteries across America and, at present, only about 25% of them currently have a Blue Star Memorial Marker onsite.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks patriotism across America was revitalized and enthusiasm for the Blue Star Memorial marker program increased substantially. Over the last twenty years there have been ninety-seven new markers ordered of all types, returning Florida to the top of the leaderboard compared to the other states in terms of total number of markers ordered since the NGC program began.

15. 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." "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 of 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.

16. 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: **Send A Greeting Email and Recognize Our Servicemen's Every Sacrifice.**

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.

17. 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 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.

18. Gold Star Families Memorial Markers Introduced



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. 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.

19. Gold Star Families Memorial Markers in Florida



On March 19, 2017 the Oleander Garden Club of the Palm Beaches dedicated a Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker and a Gold Star Families Memorial By-Way Marker – the latter being the first NGC sponsored Gold Star Families Memorial in Florida. Both of these markers were funded by a grant from a local Elks Lodge.

On October 20, 2018 the Gainesville Garden Club dedicated Florida's first Gold Star Families Memorial Marker (the large sized marker) in front of the Malcom Randal VA Medical Center in Gainesville. This marker was also funded by the local Elks Lodge.



Betty Sue Vincent, a Gold Star Families member and a member of the Gainesville Garden Club, along with Pamela Howell sewed together an unveiling cover. After use at the October, 2018 Gainesville dedication the cover was donated to the FFGC for further usage at future Gold Star Memorial dedication ceremonies.

20. Florida's Blue & Gold Star Memorial Activity to Date

Since the Blue Star Memorial program began over 75 years ago over 3,300 Blue Star Memorial Markers have been dedicated. There are more than 70,000 miles of highways across the country designated as Blue Star Memorial Highways. The markers and their living memorial gardens may be seen in all 50 states. As of April of 2021, there have been at least 70 of the NGC's Gold Star Families Memorial Markers dedicated.

In 2021, with over 200 *new* Blue Star Memorial markers of all types ordered since the program began (not including replacement markers) Florida leads all states with California and Georgia being second and third, respectively. Florida also has dedicated six Gold Star Families memorial markers.

Over the years many of the older markers have been replaced and/or refurbished. In Florida at present there are about 30 markers which have gone missing and are presumed lost or were destroyed (usually due to vehicle accident). Thus, currently in Florida there are about 170 markers currently in place.

In Florida there also are about thirty Blue Star Memorial markers where the sponsoring garden club is no longer affiliated with the FFGC or the club no longer exists. These markers are referred to as "orphans".

The orphaned markers are not in all cases without benefactors. In some instances, the original garden club is still active and remains committed to caring for the marker. In a few cases a city or county government, a historical society, or another non-garden club entity has taken on the responsibility to ensure that the orphaned marker visibly remains a fitting tribute to our veterans. And, there are occasions where other FFGC garden clubs have stepped in and "adopted" the orphaned marker. The Temple Terrace Garden Club deserves special mention in that, aside from the marker they ordered and dedicated themselves in 2004, the club has adopted and refurbished two additional orphaned Blue Star Memorial markers in the Tampa area. And, in 2020 the Miami Beach Garden Club adopted and refurbished one of Florida's earliest markers originally dedicated over sixty-five years ago along US 1 in Miami.



At present there are still approximately ten Blue Star Memorial markers across Florida which have been orphaned and have not yet been adopted, such as the one pictured at left. Virtually all of these orphaned, un-adopted markers are in need of restoration after typically several decades of exposure

to the elements. Each of them includes the NGC named usually within the medallion on top, and most also name the FFGC. As such, when the markers no longer give a proper homage to our veterans they do not reflect well on our organization. Such markers also do not represent fitting tributes to our veterans. Therefore, nearby garden clubs and/or Districts are being encouraged to consider adoption of the orphaned markers. Often the state federations have established grants or fundraising activities directed at caring for orphaned markers.

21. 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

22. FFGC Blue Star Chairmen

1947-49	Mrs. C. Verne Klintworth (Sue), Tampa ⁽¹⁾
1949-51	Mrs. Alfred R. Trafford (Pearl), Cocoa ⁽¹⁾
1951-53	Mrs. W.E. MacArthur (Bessie), Jacksonville
1953-55	Mrs. Wesley Coleman (Lima), Jacksonville
1955-57	Mrs. Clifford B. McLeod (Mary Virginia), Crestview
1957-61	Mrs. George J. Roark (Maud), Pensacola
1961-63	Mrs. Nicholas A. Tierny (Cecelia), Miami Beach
1963-65	Mrs. Jack W. Dunlap (Hazel), Orange Park
1965-67	Mrs. George J. Roark (Maud), Pensacola
1967-69	Mrs. Daniel J. Kelly, St. Petersburg
1969-71	Mrs. John G. Schiffmacher (Dorothy), Tampa
1971-73	Mrs. Rhett E. Enzor (Opal), Crestview
1973-75	Mrs. Jack P. Monroe (Phyllis), Pensacola
1975-81	Mrs. R.M. Pyle, Jr. (Emmergene), Pensacola
1981-83	Mrs. C. E. Graham (Frankie), Neptune Beach
1983-84	Mrs. R.C. Goulet (Virginia), Sugarloaf Shores
1984-85	Mrs. Robert Short (Emma), Gainesville
1985-87	Mrs. W.E. Black (Mary Nell), St. Augustine
1987-89	Mrs. Ira J. Varnedoe (Hilda), Jacksonville
1989-91	Mrs. Harry J. Painter (Emma Jeane), Dunnellon
1991-93	Mrs. Francis C. Millican (Estelle), Sarasota
1993-94	Mrs. John W. Etheridge (Virginia), Vero Beach
1994-95	Mrs. Harold Allen (Lois), Naples
1995-97	Mrs. Ernst H. Guise (Jo Ann), Boca Raton
1997-03	Patricia R. Grulke (Pat), Fort Myers
2003-05	Joan K. Garrison, Tampa
2005-09	Carol G. Brown, Crystal River
2009-13	Molly G. Tenney, Sun City Center
2013-15	Elizabeth R. Call (Betty), Bradenton
2015-23	Rosita A. Aristoff, Palm City ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Roadside Development and Blue Star Highway Chairman

⁽²⁾ Blue Star Memorial and Gold Star Families Memorial Chairman

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