



# **BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS**

## **HISTORY OF BLUE STAR MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS**

The Blue Star Memorial Highway system is a fine illustration of what can be accomplished in Roadside Beautification. This project grew from the beautifying of six miles of highway by the New Jersey Garden Clubs in 1944 and now includes the entire United States. It is one of the most extensive projects ever undertaken by garden clubs and the first attempted on a nationwide scale. Its success paved the way for the anti-litter drive and other national projects.

The Blue Star Memorial Highways take their name from the blue star in the service flag. They are a living memorial to “all those who have served or will serve in the nation’s armed forces.” The project was organized as a demonstration of roadside beautification, 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, Inc. (now known as National Garden Clubs, Inc.) could best work with the civil authorities for major achievement.

At the close of World War II, the National Council, like other public-spirited groups, was seeking a suitable means of honoring servicemen and women. It was agreed that as garden clubs, it would be better to help beautify and preserve the country the men and women had fought for rather than build stone monuments. The New Jersey clubs had just finished beautifying a section of one of their state’s highways as a War Memorial, working with the New Jersey Highway Commissioner, Spencer Miller, Jr., when Mr. Miller, a guest speaker at the National Council annual convention in 1945, suggested that this program be projected on a nationwide basis. This was just the kind of project that the National Council had been looking for.

Using the New Jersey project as its model, the National Council made a study of the inter-regional highways of the United States. A Blue Star Highway system was outlined, consisting of one east-west and seven north-south highways. (Today we have many more.) Highway commissioners were informed of the plan as were the garden clubs of each state, and all were invited to participate. Every state president was asked to secure the collaboration of their State Highway Department before undertaking a Blue Star project, as this was considered requisite to the success of the plan. A uniform marker was adopted to show memorialization, the design of which was a gift from Cornelia Kellogg, founder of the National Council.

The Blue Star Project was inaugurated under the presidency of Helen Champlin, with Elizabeth Hood as its first chairperson. The original New Jersey project was undertaken when Helen Hull was state president. She succeeded Helen Champlin as President of the National Council and guided the project through its early years as a national undertaking.

In the 1980’s, an extension of the Blue Star Memorial Highway program was approved call the Blue Star Memorial By-Way, the Blue Star By-Way award was established and a new small By-way Memorial Marker was created.