

New Jersey's BLUE STAR MEMORIALS

History of the Blue Star Memorial Highways



*A Living Tribute to the
Men and Women of New
Jersey who served in the
Armed Forces*

A project of the Garden Club of New Jersey, under the guidance of the Blue Star Memorial Highway Council, in cooperation with the state Highway Department.

After the Allied victory in World War II, thoughts turned to ways to remember and honor America's service men and women. Memorials had always been made of stone or bronze, or were buildings named for a war hero or battle. During the spring of 1944, while Eisenhower and his troops were preparing to land on the beaches of Normandy, Mrs. Lewis Hull, president of the Garden Club of N.J., Mrs. Vance Hood, roadside chairman, and Spencer Miller, Jr., N.J. highway commissioner, came up with what then Governor Walter E. Edge called "an inspired idea." The group envisioned a "living" memorial to these veterans.

The proposed plan sought to protect the beauty of the countryside for the return of the men and women from N.J. who were at war defending the safety of the nation, rather than build stone monuments. It called for a five-mile planting of flowering dogwood trees in a landscaped area along US Route 29 (now Route 22) between Mountainside and North Plainfield, where all who traveled that road might share in the beauty and homage. No billboards would be allowed on the memorial stretch. The project was named the Blue Star Drive, for the



blue star in the service flag. During the war, families would hang an Armed Forces Service Banner in the window for each family member on active duty. The banner, or service flag, featured a blue star on a white background framed in red.

In June 1944, with the slogan "a dollar plants a tree on the Blue Star

Drive," the project was launched. With the cooperation of nurseries, citizens were invited to plant dogwood trees for the members of their families in the Armed Forces. The flowering dogwood was selected as the featured tree because it is the state's most beautiful native tree. It has two seasons of beauty: snow white blossoms in the spring, brilliant red berries in the fall. Service clubs and corporations made

contributions for those whose names were on their honor rolls. In November 1944, the first group of trees was planted on Chapel Island in Mountainside. The Garden Club gave the first planting of 1,000 trees from funds raised at the First Annual Garden State Flower Show

and in a six month campaign which raised \$25,000. In January 1945 the state Legislature commemorated the Blue Star Drive by joint resolution, and, through subsequent legislation, provided for the acquisition of all undeveloped land bordering the Blue Star Drive for plantings.



Dedication of Interstate 295 as part of the Blue Star Memorial Highway system.

At the semi-annual meeting of the National Council of Garden Clubs in New York City in October 1945, the Blue Star Drive project was proposed as a “ribbon of living memorial plantings traversing every state,” to be called the Blue Star Memorial Highway. Mrs. Hull and Mrs. Hood assumed responsibility for implementing the program for the National Council. 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 Garden Clubs could best work with the civil authorities for major achievement. In 1951, the tribute of the memorial was extended to include all men and women who had served, were serving or would serve in the Armed Forces of the United States.

Garden clubs from across the nation petitioned their state legislatures to designate a section of highway as a segment of the Blue Star Memorial Highway. Once designated, the garden clubs would then purchase a commemorative marker and plantings of diversified indig-

enous trees and shrubs to beautify the existing landscape. The state of New Jersey memorialized the entire length of Route 22 as the state's link in the national chain.

The Blue Star Highway Marker was designed by Mrs. Frederick Kellogg, one of the founders and early presidents of the National Council, in 1947.

In 1948, a seven-member Blue Star Advisory Council was established by Legislative action in New Jersey, to safeguard and promote the national and state memorial highways. The council is composed of four Garden Club representatives and three state representatives.

The Blue Star Memorial Highway was one of the most extensive projects ever undertaken by garden clubs and the first ever attempted on a nationwide scale. It crosses the nation east and west and north and south. Every state is crossed by at least one such highway. The plan did not call for an uninterrupted planting across the country, but rather a national road beautified at intervals with memorial plantings appropriate for the location and featuring the state trees or other plant material native to the area. The success of the program paved the



way of the anti-litter drive and other national projects.

In New Jersey, US Route 22, Inter-states 78, 80, 287 and 295 are dedicated as memorial highways. The program has been extended to include smaller roads and garden

settings (Blue Star Memorial By-ways), and veterans cemeteries or facilities (Blue Star Memorials).

The Blue Star Memorial Council in New Jersey is the link between the Department of Transportation and the Garden Club of New Jersey. Together their efforts have served to maintain and improve the image of the Garden State.