

History of the Blue Star Memorials

Begins with the History of the Blue Star

Back around 400 BC, the Blue Star idea was forming. Alexander the Great, 363-323, made use of this symbol for heroism.

This Blue Star symbol continued through the centuries - to the United States. George Washington, as President presented the purple heart to two men who had fought under him, for 'exceptional bravery'. This medal was not as it became later, but contained the blue star.

Following the founding of this country, there were trouble-makers who were power-hungry, greedy, ... - these continued to cause trouble between periods of being quieted down. Around 1858, some vicious uprisings occurred leading some states to decide to separate from the established Union. On 4 February 1861, the Confederacy was formed, in Montgomery, Alabama; delegates from South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana convened to establish the Confederate States of America. Following the Republican victory over the divided Democratic Party in November 1860, South Carolina immediately initiated secession proceedings; on 20 December, its legislature passed the "Ordinance of Secession," declaring "the Union now subsisting between South Carolina and other states, under the name of the United States of America, is hereby dissolved." After this declaration, South Carolina seized forts, arsenals, and other strategic locations within the state. Within six weeks, five more Southern states had followed South Carolina; in February 1861, representatives from the six seceded states met in Montgomery, Alabama, to formally establish a unified government, the Confederate States of America, electing on 9 February, Mississippi's Jefferson Davis as president. By March 1861, Texas had joined the Confederacy, federal troops held only Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Fort Pickens off the Florida coast, and a handful of minor outposts in the South. On 12 April 1861, Confederate shore batteries under General P.G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Bay. Within two months, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee had joined the Confederacy.



James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), minister, poet, and later historical writer of History of Abraham Lincoln wrote numerous patriotic, Godly poems during this time, as :

The Present Crisis

When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast,
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of the century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time.

Through the walls of hut and palace shoots the instantaneous throe,
When the travail of the Ages wrings earth's systems to and fro;
At the birth of each new Era, with a recognizing start,
Nation wildly looks at nation, standing with mute lips apart,
And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child leaps beneath the Future's heart.

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies with God
In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler clod.

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or wrong;
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast frame
Though its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or shame; --
In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide;
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 'tis Truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng
Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Oblivion's sea;
Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet earth's chaff must fly;
Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath passed by.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's page but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old system and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, --
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is great,
Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate,
But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din,
List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within, --
"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin."

Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops, fellest of the giant brood,
Sons of brutish Force and Darkness, who have drenched the earth with blood,
Famished in his self-made desert, blinded by our purer day,
Gropes in yet unblasted regions for his miserable prey;
Shall we guide his gory fingers where our helpless children play?

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes, -- they were souls that stood alone,
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone,
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme design.

By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back,

And these mounts of anguish number how each generation learned
One new word of that grand <I>Credo</I> which in prophet-hearts hath burned
Since the first man stood God-conquered with his face to heaven upturned.

For humanity sweeps onward; where today the martyr stands,
On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;
Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots burn,
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

'Tis as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves
Of a legendary virtue carved upon our father's graves,
Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a crime;
Was the Mayflower launched by cowards, steered by men behind their time?
Turn those tracks toward Past or Future, that make Plymouth Rock sublime?

They were men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue was the Past's;
But we make their truth our falsehood thinking that hath made us free,
Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our tender spirits flee
The rude grasp of that great Impulse which drove them across the sea.

They have rights who dare maintain them; we are traitors to our sires,
Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's new-lit altar-fires;
Shall we make their creed our jailor? -- Shall we, in our haste to slay,
>From the tombs of the old prophets steal the funeral lamps away
To light up the martyr-fagots round the prophets of today?

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth;
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! -- we ourselves must Pilgrims be,
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key.

Abraham Lincoln picked up Washington's idea; was ready to present the purple heart, but was assassinated before he had the chance.

Following the War between the States, was added grief brought about by the *butternuts* and *copperheads*, in the north, and the *carpetbaggers* and *scalliwags*, in the south; all trouble-making factions.

Then finally came once again a 'cooling off' period where prosperity reigned; yet the power-hungry, greedy were lurking still in the shadows.

In Europe, the Austro-Russo conflict was coming to a climax, Germany was eager to feel her power over other, weaker, nations, ... - and WWI begins; the United States joining with the Allies. Here at home, we of the United States did not immediately join in the fighting until we were threatened; this brought the men out to 'join up', and the women to comfort one another. These women formed themselves into groups of Blue Star Mothers; meeting maybe once a month, maybe weekly, sometimes daily. They would comfort one another, and try to keep the 'home fires going' as best they could. During these meetings, they would make :

The Blue Star Flag

or the War Service Flag. This flag, created in 1917, hung in homes to denote that a member of the family was in the service; one star for each person in the armed forces. This idea spread to include businesses and churches, with one star for each employee or member who had gone to a war. WWI Army Capt. Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry designed the flag; his two sons served on the front line.

Shortly, also during WWI, a gold star [the gold symbolized 'sacrifice to the cause of liberty and freedom'] would be imposed over the top of the blue one [the blue symbolized 'hope and pride'] if a service member was killed or died on active duty. This leading to the formation of the Gold Star Mothers groups.



History repeats itself -

following WWI, there was again a 'cooling off' period with prosperity reigning

But the power-hungry, greedy were never far removed; entering the political arena with FDR. Much unrest compounded the troubles suffered by many during these trying times with the inacting of a multitude of alphabet-soup programs.

The Blue Star and Gold Star Mothers were not on the forefront now; many groups having disbanded. But this idea of companionship for one another could not be erased from within their hearts. Therefore, as turmoil once again stirred Europe to war, and started uprisings in Asia, the United States stayed out. But then they attacked the United States and we again joined the Allies; this time on both sides of our own country. The Blue Star and Gold Star Mothers re-formed themselves; and with a vengeance.

Blue Star Mothers of America's

objectives and purpose shall be patriotic, educational, social, and service; to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America; to be true to the high ideals of Democracy; to encourage the principles of universal liberty, equal rights, and full justice to all men and women.

The National Council of State Garden Clubs, now National Garden Clubs, visualized a *living* memorial to the veterans of this war, and all past wars. In 1945, they finalized their plans; as they saw the returning veterans coming home.

At their Annual meeting, in NYC, Spencer Miller, NJ's State High Commissioner and VP of the American Assoc. of State Highway Officials was a featured speaker; he described a joint project of the Garden Club of NJ, with Mrs. Lewis M. Hull as president, and NJ's State Highway Dept. involving 6 miles of highway which the Legislature had designated as a memorial then was planted with flowering dogwoods then named the Blue Star Drive (Mrs. Vance R. Hood as

chairman) to honor those service personnel having served in WWII. No billboards would be allowed along this stretch. He suggested that each state adopt this idea with a similar project. Then in October, at the Semi-Annual meeting, in NYC, this idea was approved; the Blue Star project. The following April, in NO, it was adopted; Mrs. William H. Champlin being president - Mrs. Hull followed her as president ('47-49). During the intervening months, these women went to the United States Congress to make this an official project with the country. Unofficially, this project began during the war, merely snowballing as victory was seen.

The Blue Star project

was to be a ribbon of dedicated highways stretching across the country. This idea continued to spread through each of the states. The women first petitioned their state legislature to 'designate a section of highway' within the state 'as a segment of the Blue Star Memorial Highway' then once approved, the garden club(s) would purchase the marker and plan the landscaping at the chosen site, with, as suggested : 'naturalistic plantings of diversified indigenous trees and shrubs to blend with the existing landscape.' The garden club would work with the State Highway Commission and Highway Dept. from the start, requiring their approval of all plans.

Installation of Markers



Mrs. Frederic R. Kellogg (NCSGC President '30-33) of NJ presented the design for the Blue Star Highway marker.

Expansion of Project

In 1951, it was 'to include all men and women, who had served, were serving, or would serve in the armed forces of the United States.'

In April 1981, during the Annual Convention, in Atlanta, Georgia, it was determined 'to include parks, civic and historic grounds' whereby the Blue Star By-Way marker was adopted.

Then in May 1994, during the Annual Convention, in Stanford, Connecticut, it was determined the By-

Way marker should be expanded; adding the words, 'A tribute to the Armed Forces of America' and including 'National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc.' as the bottom line of the marker. This was adopted, eliminating the first one.



In May 1996, at the Annual Convention, in Traverse City, Michigan, the Blue Star Memorial marker was added, 'to include the grounds of National cemeteries and V.A. properties.'