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## Where Flowers Bloom, So Does Hope

by Bob Bryant and Bonnie L. Harper-Lore



**A native wildflower garden along U.S. Route 290 near Stonewall, Texas, was dedicated in honor of Lady Bird Johnson**

"We gathered the wild-flowers. Yes, life there seem'd one pure delight.... As thro' the field we rov'd. Yes, life there seem'd one pure delight," wrote George Linley in the 19th century.

Something about flowers delights and stirs the soul of man. Since the beginning of literature and poetry, flowers have represented beauty, nature and tranquility, and love. According to the Bible, "Not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of [the lilies of the field]." No one appreciates flowers more than Lady Bird Johnson, wife of former President Lyndon B. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson is fond of saying, "Where flowers bloom, so does hope." And for more than 30 years, Mrs. Johnson has contributed to spreading hope and beautifying America by promoting the use of wildflowers along the highways of the nation.

"Because of you, Mrs. Johnson, the country that builds the most roads, also builds the most aesthetic roads," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney E. Slater on Aug. 27, 1997, as he dedicated a roadside native wildflower garden in honor of Mrs. Johnson. "From coast-to-coast, every state in the union now plants wildflowers. Your love has become America's love of flowers." The garden is located at the Church Park rest area on U.S. Route 290 near Stonewall, Texas. This site is also near the LBJ Ranch, Mrs. Johnson's home since 1952.

President Clinton sent a message in which he said, "Mrs. Johnson was among the first to recognize that how we build and maintain America's roads demonstrates our respect and admiration for the beautiful and spacious land we have inherited. The effort she launched a generation ago to beautify our highways has reaped benefits in all 50 states and helped to inspire our nation's commitment to environmental protection."

During her husband's administration from 1963 to 1969, Mrs. Johnson promoted efforts to protect the environment, including the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 which called for improving landscaping, removing billboards, and screening roadside junkyards. After President Johnson left office, Mrs. Johnson continued to be a champion of environmental initiatives. In 1982, she founded the National Wildflower Research Center, and in 1987, she helped add the native wildflower requirement as an amendment to the Surface Transportation Urban Relocation Authorization Act. The use of native wildflowers and grasses along roadside has increased dramatically since that time.

The wildflower program is administered at the federal level by the Department of Transportation, which President Johnson created in 1967. As part of the department's 30th anniversary celebration, Secretary Slater dedicated the Church Park wildflower garden, created by the Federal Highway Administration and the Texas Department of Transportation as a special thanks to Mrs. Johnson and her tireless efforts on behalf of the use and preservation of native wildflowers.

This garden will be a model for other interpretative gardens throughout the nation as each state shows off its native wildflowers. Currently, 38 states have programs to preserve and restore native vegetation.

These states have discovered many benefits in roadside wildflowers, including a major reduction in maintenance costs as a result of less mowing. **Texas, for example, has documented a reduction of roadside**

maintenance costs of about 25 percent -- about \$8 million per year. Other benefits include: increased wildlife habitat and biodiversity; improved erosion control; enhanced aesthetics; increased planting success with hardy native plants; strengthened partnerships with natural resource agencies and volunteer groups; suppressed noxious weed invasions, which are costly; and a demonstrated commitment to the environment.

The use of roadside wildflowers to beautify highways has come a very long way in the past 30 years, and much of this progress is directly attributable to the efforts and support of Mrs. Johnson. And so, if the sight of wildflowers along the road makes your trip more pleasant, thank Mrs. Johnson.

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