



The Mississippi Blues Trail

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Welcome to the Mississippi Blues Trail, your unforgettable journey into the land that spawned the single most important root source of modern popular music. Whether you’re a die-hard blues fan or a casual traveler in search of an interesting trip, you’ll find facts you didn’t know, places you’ve never seen, and you’ll gain a new appreciation for the area that gave birth to the blues.

The Blues Trail markers tell stories through words and images of bluesmen and women and how the places where they lived and the times in which they existed, and continue to exist, influenced their music. We have a lot to share, and it’s just down the Mississippi Blues Trail.

61 HIGHWAY

1000 South Washington Street, Vicksburg, Mississippi

The rise of the automobile and the development of a national highway system in the 1920s and '30s coincided with the initial boom of blues, jazz, and spiritual recordings by African American artists. Songs in the African American tradition about riverboats, trains, and railroads were soon complemented by records about highways, cars, and buses. The most prominent highway in blues lore was U.S. Highway 61 or "61 Highway," as it was often called in decades past.

Highway 61 occupies an important place in the blues, serving both as a popular lyrical symbol for travel and the actual route by which many artists moved northward. The original route of U. S. Highway 61 that was mapped out in the 1920s ran from downtown New Orleans to Grand Portage, Minnesota, on the Canadian border and connected cities including Memphis, St. Louis, and St. Paul. Within Mississippi the highway was initially mostly gravel and ran approximately four hundred miles through the downtown areas of many communities. Today's route, which largely bypasses city centers, is considerably straighter and about eighty miles shorter.

The blues likely emerged in the late 1890s and the early 1900s, around the same time as the introduction of the automobile. Cars were initially somewhat of a novelty and luxury product – there were reportedly only twenty in Mississippi in 1900 – but this situation changed dramatically following the Ford Motor Company's introduction of the Model T in 1908 and the moving assembly line in 1913; by 1920 there were eight million registered cars on the road. This growth was accompanied by widespread demands by commercial interests and citizens' groups to build roads for the promotion of economic development, national defense, and tourism.

In 1916, when World War I raised concerns about interstate transportation of goods, the federal government initiated aid to states for road building, and the Federal Highway Act of 1921 mandated a national highway system. U.S. Highway 61 was one of nine numbered highways that ran through Mississippi that were officially designated in November of 1926, and construction on the initial road continued until the early '40s. By this time at least seven blues singers had recorded songs about Highway 61; later artists who cut songs on the theme included Vicksburg's Johnny Young and Bob Dylan, who recorded the influential 1965 album "Highway 61 Revisited."

Among the African American singers and musicians who have lived in communities along the southern stretch of Highway 61 in Mississippi are Willie Dixon, Louisiana Red, Artie "Blues Boy" White, Percy Strother, Greg Osgood & Cee Blaque, Little Joe Blue, Milt Hinton, and the Red Tops from Vicksburg; Muddy Waters and Johnny Dyer from Rolling Fork; J. D. Short from Port Gibson; Hezekiah & the Houserockers, Papa Lightfoot, William "Cat Iron" Carradine, Jimmy Anderson, Elmo Williams, and the Ealey brothers from Natchez; and Scott Dunbar, Polka Dot Slim, Robert Cage, Lester Young, and William Grant Still from Woodville.

ABBAY & LEATHERMAN

3824 Highway 304, Robinsonville, Mississippi

Abbey & Leatherman, one of the oldest and largest cotton plantations in the Delta, is known to music enthusiasts worldwide as the boyhood home of blues icon Robert Johnson (circa 1912 to 1938). Johnson lived here with his family in a tenant shack by the levee during the 1920s. The powerful and impassioned recordings he made in 1936 to 1937 are often cited as the foundation of rock 'n' roll, and the facts, fantasies, and mysteries of his life and death are a continuing source of intrigue.

Robert Johnson would become known as the "King of the Delta Blues," heralded not only as a dramatic and emotional vocalist but also as an innovative and influential master of the guitar and a blues poet who could chill listeners with the dark depths of his lyrical vision. But he was recalled only as a good harmonica player who had limited skills as a guitarist during his adolescent years here on the Abbey & Leatherman plantation. Johnson left the Delta around 1930, but when he reappeared about two years later he possessed such formidable guitar technique that Robinsonville blues luminary Son House later remarked that Johnson must have "sold his soul to the devil." The 1986 Hollywood movie, *Crossroads*, was based on the legend of Johnson's alleged deal with the devil, as were several subsequent documentaries and books.

Johnson was born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, the illegitimate son of Julia Dodds and Noah Johnson. May 8, 1911, is often cited as his birth date, although some sources, including a census listing and his death certificate, point to 1912. His mother once sent him to Memphis to live with his father, Charles Dodds (aka Charles Spencer) but took him back after she married Willie "Dusty" Willis at Abbey & Leatherman in 1916. Johnson, then known as Robert Spencer, reportedly lived here for a decade or more beginning in about 1918. Records from the nearby Indian Creek School verify his enrollment there. However, the 1920 census shows Will and Julia Willis and Robert Spencer in Lucas, Arkansas, in the same county where Abbey & Leatherman owner Samuel Richard Leatherman once acquired additional cotton farming property.

Johnson married Virginia Travis at the Tunica County courthouse in 1929, but his wife died in childbirth on April 10, 1930. Back in Hazlehurst, Johnson found himself a new wife, Callie Craft, as well as a musical mentor, guitarist Ike Zimmerman. He soon left married life behind to pursue a career as an itinerant musician, now able to play alongside the best bluesmen in the Delta, including Son House and Willie Brown, and to entertain crowds wherever he went with a reputation for being able to play any song after hearing it just once. He began recording in 1936, and though his recordings proved highly influential in the course of blues and rock 'n' roll history, few of them sold well during his lifetime. His death near Greenwood on August 16, 1938, has often been attributed to poisoning, although the case remains a mystery. Johnson was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in its first year, 1980, and into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame also in its initial year, 1986.

ABERDEEN MISSISSIPPI BLUES

Commerce and Meridian Street, Aberdeen, Mississippi

In 1940 singer-guitarist Booker “Bukka” White, who lived in Aberdeen during the 1920s and ‘30s, recorded the blues classic “Aberdeen Mississippi Blues.” Twenty-three years later the song’s title enabled blues researchers to relocate White, who subsequently resumed his recording career. According to Social Security records two of the most influential blues artists of all time, Chester Arthur “Howlin’ Wolf” Burnett and Albert King, claimed Aberdeen as their birthplace.

“Aberdeen Mississippi Blues” was one of many powerful and original blues songs recorded by Bukka White (circa 1904 to 1977) at his historic Chicago session in March 1940. White’s recording career might have ended then had not his music inspired new interest during the folk-blues boom of the 1960s. Relying on White’s recording for a possible address, guitarist and researcher John Fahey sent a postcard to “Bukka White, Old Blues Singer, in care of General Delivery, Aberdeen, Miss.” Remarkably, the card was forwarded to White, who was living in Memphis. He was soon recording again and was hailed as one of the finest performers among the older bluesmen whose careers were revived in the ‘60s. Born near Houston, White spent many of his early years performing and farming in Chickasaw, Monroe, and Tallahatchie counties, rambling in and out of the Aberdeen area, and marrying several local women in the process. After he shot a man at a nearby juke joint he was sentenced to Parchman Penitentiary in 1937. Already a recording artist, White found another opportunity to record when folklorist John Lomax arrived at Parchman in 1939 to collect songs for the Library of Congress. Some of White’s most memorable songs, including “Parchman Farm Blues,” “District Attorney Blues,” and “When Can I Change My Clothes,” were based on his trial and incarceration.

Chester Arthur Burnett, better known as Howlin’ Wolf, was another preeminent bluesman with Aberdeen roots. He often said he was born in Aberdeen in 1910, although biographers later cited his birthplace as White Station in Clay County, where he was listed in the 1920 census. Most local births at the time occurred not in towns but on farms, and Wolf was probably born in between Aberdeen and West Point. His parents were married in Monroe County in 1909 (Wolf’s birth year according to some documents; others indicate 1911). Wolf moved to the Delta as a youngster and later became famed in West Memphis and Chicago for his fearsome and charismatic stage persona and his bold, dynamic music. He died in 1976.

Albert King (1923 to 1992), often billed as “King of the Blues Guitar,” was a hero among blues and rock musicians and audiences. Documentation of his earliest years is vague, and King—whose surname at birth may have been Nelson, Blevins, or Gilmore—only added to the confusion in the 1960s by claiming B. B. King as his brother, which was denied by B. B., and further citing B. B.’s hometown of Indianola as his own. However, on his Social Security application in 1942, his birthplace was entered as “Aboden, Miss.,” likely based on his pronunciation of Aberdeen. King was raised primarily in Arkansas and later resided in Lovejoy, Illinois.

ACE RECORDS - JACKSON

Capitol and Roach Streets, Jackson, Mississippi

Ace Records, founded in 1955 by Johnny Vincent (1925 to 2000), was the most successful Mississippi-based label of the 1950s and 1960s. Ace's extensive catalog of blues, R&B, pop, rock, and soul included records by Mississippi blues artists Arthur Crudup, Sam Myers, King Edward, Pat Brown, and Willie Clayton, as well as hit singles by Louisiana singers Jimmy Clanton, Frankie Ford, Huey "Piano" Smith, and Earl King. Ace was based for many years on this block of West Capitol Street.

Johnny Vincent, born John Vincent Imbraguglio (later modified to Imbragulio) on October 3, 1925, became fascinated with the blues via the jukebox at his parents' restaurant in Laurel. After serving in the Merchant Marine he started his own jukebox business in Laurel, and in 1947 became a sales representative for a New Orleans record distributor. In the late '40s Vincent purchased Griffin Distributing Company in Jackson and operated both Griffin and a retail business, the Record Shop, at 241 North Farish Street. He started the Champion label in the early '50s, issuing blues singles by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup of Forest and Jackson musicians Joe Dyson and Bernard "Bunny" Williams. In 1953 Vincent signed on as a talent scout for Los Angeles-based Specialty Records. His most notable production for Specialty was "The Things I Used to Do," recorded in New Orleans by Guitar Slim, aka Eddie Jones, a native of Greenwood. Featuring Ray Charles on piano, the song was one of the biggest R&B hits of the 1950s. During his tenure with Specialty Vincent also supervised sessions by John Lee Hooker, Kenzie Moore, and others.

In 1955 Vincent started Ace, named after the Ace Combs brand. The label's first hit, "Those Lonely, Lonely Nights" by New Orleans bluesman Earl King, was recorded at Trumpet Records' Diamond Recording Studio at 309 North Farish Street. Ace became the first important regional label for New Orleans music, scoring national hits by Louisiana artists Huey Smith and the Clowns ("Don't You Just Know It"), Frankie Ford ("Sea Cruise"), and Jimmy Clanton, a "teen idol" whose "Just A Dream" topped the R&B charts in 1960. Among the Ace artists who recorded either at the New Orleans studio of Cosimo Matassa or here in Jackson in the 1950s and '60s were Sam Myers, Joe Tex, Bobby Marchan, James Booker, Charles Brown, Joe Dyson, Lee Dorsey, Rufus McKay, Scotty McKay, Big Boy Myles, Tim Whitsett, and Mac Rebennack, later known as "Dr. John."

In 1962 Vincent signed a potentially lucrative distribution deal with Vee-Jay Records of Chicago, but that label's bankruptcy in 1966 was catastrophic for Ace. In the '70s Vincent revamped Ace, making new recordings as well as repackaging old hits, but had only limited success. He turned to various other enterprises, including a restaurant, but returned to the record business with full force in the early '90s, as he reoriented Ace to the contemporary soul-blues market with a roster that included Mississippi-born singers Cicero Blake, Robert "The Duke" Tillman, J. T. Watkins, Pat Brown, and Willie Clayton. The latter pair had success with the duet "Equal Opportunity." In 1997 Vincent sold Ace to the British firm Music Collection International but started a new label, Avanti, and continued to record soul-blues artists. Vincent died on February 4, 2000.

ALBERT KING

Front and Second Streets, Indianola, Mississippi

Albert King (1923-1992), who was billed as "King of the Blues Guitar," was famed for his powerful string-bending style as well as for his soulful, smoky vocals. King often said he was born in Indianola and was a half-brother of B. B. King, although the scant surviving official documentation suggests otherwise on both counts. King carved his own indelible niche in the blues hierarchy by creating a deep, dramatic sound that was widely imitated by both blues and rock guitarists.

Albert King's readily identifiable style made him one of the most important artists in the history of the blues, but his own identity was a longtime source of confusion. In interviews he said he was born in Indianola on April 25, 1923 (or 1924), and whenever he appeared here at Club Ebony, the event was celebrated as a homecoming. He often claimed to be a half-brother of Indianola icon B. B. King, citing the fact that B. B.'s father was named Albert King. But when he applied for a Social Security card in 1942, he gave his birthplace as "Aboden" (most likely Aberdeen), Mississippi, and signed his name as Albert Nelson, listing his father as Will Nelson. Musicians also knew him as Albert Nelson in the 1940s and '50s. But when he made his first record in 1953—when B. B. had become a national blues star—he became Albert King, and by 1959 he was billed in newspaper ads as "B. B. King's brother." He also sometimes used the same nickname as B. B.—"Blues Boy"—and named his guitar Lucy (B. B.'s instrument was Lucille). B. B., however, claimed Albert as just a friend, not a relative, and once retorted, "My name was King before I was famous."

According to King, he was five when his father left the family and eight when he moved with his mother, Mary Blevins, and two sisters to the Forrest City, Arkansas, area. King said his family had also lived in Arcola, Mississippi, at one time. He made his first guitar out of a cigar box, a piece of a bush, and a strand of broom wire, and later bought a real guitar for \$1.25. As a southpaw learning guitar on his own, he turned his guitar upside down. King picked cotton, drove a bulldozer, did construction, and worked other jobs until he was finally able to support himself as a musician.

King's first band was the In the Groove Boys, based in Osceola, Arkansas. In the early '50s he also worked with a gospel group, the Harmony Kings, in South Bend, Indiana, and—as a drummer—with bluesman Jimmy Reed in the Gary/Chicago area. He recorded his debut single for Parrot Records in Chicago before returning to Osceola and then moving to Lovejoy, Illinois. Recordings in St. Louis drew new attention to his talents and a stint with Stax Records in Memphis (1966-1974) put his name in the forefront of the blues. Rock audiences and musicians created a new, devoted fan base, while King's funky, soulful approach helped him maintain a following in the African American community. Among his most notable records were *Live Wire/Blues Power*, an album recorded at the Fillmore in San Francisco, and the Stax singles "Born Under a Bad Sign," "Cross Cut Saw," "The Hunter," and "I'll Play the Blues for You." King remained a major name in blues and was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 1983, but he never enjoyed the commercial success that many of his followers (including Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan) did. He died after a heart attack in Memphis, his frequent base in his final years, on December 21, 1992.

ARTHUR "BIG BOY" CRUDUP

477 West 3rd Street, Forest, Mississippi

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, one of the most prominent blues recording artists of the 1940s, was born on his grandparents' land in Forest on August 24, 1905. After Elvis Presley recorded three Crudup songs in the 1950s, Crudup became known as "The Father of Rock 'n' Roll." Despite the commercial success of his songs, Crudup was never fairly paid for the music he composed and recorded, and had to work as a laborer or bus driver to support his family. He died on March 28, 1974.

Crudup was one of America's top-selling blues artists long before Elvis Presley, Elton John, Rod Stewart, and other pop stars began recording his songs. But like many other performers who had little education and little familiarity with the music business or copyright law, Crudup fell victim to exploitation. Only after his death did his heirs finally succeed in securing his copyrights and long-overdue royalties.

Crudup, who grew up singing spirituals, did not start playing guitar until he was in his thirties. In 1941, while playing on the streets in Chicago, he was offered a chance to record for RCA Victor's Bluebird label. His unique sound and memorable lyrics caught on with record buyers, and he continued to record for RCA until 1954. His best known records included "Rock Me Mama," "Mean Old 'Frisco Blues," and three that were covered by Presley: "That's All Right," "My Baby Left Me," and "So Glad You're Mine." Crudup rarely played concerts or theaters until the blues revival of the 1960s, but he was a juke joint favorite in Mississippi, where he performed with Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson, and locals such as George Lee, Odell Lay, and Clyde Lay. In Forest he played dance halls and cafes where both blacks and whites attended despite segregation policies of the time. He stacked lumber, picked cotton, and sold bootleg liquor, and finally started his own business transporting migrant workers between Florida and Virginia after he left Forest in the mid-1950s. He recorded in later years for the Fire and Delmark labels, but remained a working man who never depended on music to survive. His sons James, Jonas, and George formed their own band in Florida and later recorded a CD as the Crudup Brothers. A nephew, Robert Earl "Little Jr." Crudup, also launched a performing career in Oakland, California, in the 1980s.

James "T-Model" Ford, another self-taught Forest musician, also took up guitar late in life (in his fifties). Ford, born June 20, 1924, was a laborer, logger, and truck driver before he became a blues-man in the Delta. In the 1990s his CDs on the Oxford-based Fat Possum label enabled him to start touring the country while maintaining a performing base at nightspots near his home in Greenville.

Another former Forest resident, Ruben Hughes, was honored with a resolution from the Mississippi Legislature in 2002 for his work in radio. Hughes, born Sept. 9, 1938, got his first job as a blues deejay on WMAG in Forest at the age of sixteen. He broadcast on several stations before he founded WGNL in Greenwood in 1987. Hughes recalled working with Arthur Crudup on a Forest poultry farm in the early 1950s.

BAPTIST TOWN

200 Short Street, Greenwood, Mississippi

Baptist Town, established in the 1800s in tandem with the growth of the local cotton industry, is one of Greenwood's oldest African American neighborhoods. Known for its strong sense of community, it is anchored by the McKinney Chapel M.B. Church and a former cotton compress. In blues lore Baptist Town is best known through the reminiscences of David "Honeyboy" Edwards, who identified it as the final residence of Robert Johnson, who died just outside Greenwood in 1938.

Robert Johnson and Honeyboy Edwards were just two of the legendary blues singers who rambled in and out of Greenwood during the era when life revolved around cotton plantations, gins, compresses, and oil mills. African American workers settled in Baptist Town, Gritney, G.P. (Georgia Pacific) Town, Buckeye Quarters, and other neighborhoods, although the majority lived on outlying plantations. Blues and gospel music flourished, and when Greenwood's venues closed for the night, revelers often headed to the outskirts of town or out to the plantations where the music could continue unimpeded on weekends. According to Edwards, Baptist Town was a safe haven for a musician who wanted to escape work in the cotton fields, and both he and Johnson found places to stay here in 1938 on Young Street, around the corner from this site. They performed locally at the Three Forks juke joint, along with Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller), who was a familiar figure around Greenwood for several decades. Johnson was allegedly poisoned at the juke by a jealous lover or her husband, and spent some of his final days on Young Street, Edwards recalled. Johnson died on August 16, 1938, on the Star of the West Plantation.

Another prominent blues artist based in Greenwood in the 1930s was guitarist Tommy McClennan, who once lived at 207 East McLaurin Street, half a mile south of this marker. McLaurin Street's clubs, cafes, pool halls, and gambling dens made it the center of local African American nightlife. In Baptist Town and other areas, including the downtown shopping district of Johnson Street, musicians also played on the streets and at house parties. Mississippi John Hurt from Avalon performed in Greenwood sometimes, and during the 1950s his son John William "Man" Hurt lived in Baptist Town and played guitar in the Friendly Four gospel group with his cousin Teddy Hurt. Another Baptist Town guitarist, Harvie Cook, moved to Indianapolis in 1958. His band, Harvey and the Bluetones, became one of Indiana's top blues acts.

Robert "Dr. Feelgood" Potts and his daughter, Sheba Potts-Wright, lived in Greenwood before launching blues recording careers in Memphis. Willie Cobbs, composer of the blues standard "You Don't Love Me," lived and recorded in Greenwood in the 1980s, when he operated Mr. C's Bar-B-Q at 824 Walthall Street. Other blues and R&B performers from the Greenwood area have included Eddie "Guitar Slim" Jones, Furry Lewis, Robert Petway, Rubin Lacy, Maurice King, Betty Everett, Hubert Sumlin, Denise LaSalle, Richard "Hacksaw" Harney, Calvin "Fuzz" Jones, Bobby Hines, the Givens Brothers, Hound Dog Taylor, Brewer Phillips, Fenton Robinson, "Lonnie The Cat" Cation, Matt Cockrell, Aaron Moore, Curtis "Mississippi Bo" Williams, Guitar Blue, Buddy Warren, and Nora Jean Bruso.

B.B. KING BIRTHPLACE

County Road 513, Berclair, Mississippi

The long and remarkable life of B.B. King began near this site, where he was born Riley B. King on September 16, 1925. His parents, Albert and Nora Ella King, were sharecroppers who lived in a simple home southeast of here along Bear Creek. After his parents separated when he was four, King lived in Kilmichael and Lexington before moving as a teen to Indianola, which he referred to as his hometown.

"Ambassador of the Blues" and "King of the Blues" are titles Riley "B.B." King earned as the result of decades of touring around the world. But the life of King, who is probably the most influential musician in the history of the blues, could not have begun more humbly. His earliest years were spent at a sharecroppers' cabin a little more than half a mile south-east of this marker.

King's parents split up when he was a small child. He and his mother moved around, eventually settling fifty miles east in Kilmichael with his grandmother, Elnora Farr; both died while King was young. Following a brief stay with his father's new family in Lexington and living on his own in Kilmichael, King moved in 1943 to Indianola. There he worked as a tractor driver, got married, performed with a gospel quartet, and began actively playing the blues.

In the late '40s King moved to Memphis to pursue a musical career. By 1949 he had found work as a deejay on radio station WDIA, in addition to winning talent contests at the Palace Theater. At WDIA he earned the nickname "B.B."—short for "Blues Boy." His career took off in 1952 with his first No. 1 rhythm & blues hit, "Three O'Clock Blues," and over the next decades he scored dozens of hits on the RPM, Kent, ABC, BluesWay, and MCA labels. He toured relentlessly, performing over 350 one-night stands one year. Until the 1960s the vast majority of King's fans were African Americans, but by the end of that decade young whites had embraced his music. His guitar playing has served as a model for countless blues, rock, and rhythm & blues musicians.

King's 1970 crossover hit "The Thrill Is Gone"—which provided him with the first of over a dozen Grammy awards—was the launching point for international stardom. Among his many subsequent recordings were collaborations with artists across the musical spectrum including Willie Nelson, U2, Eric Clapton, Luciano Pavarotti and Heavy D. All the while King never forgot the folks back home, and in the '60s began making regular visits back to Mississippi for events including an annual celebration in honor of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, and later, a "B.B. King Homecoming" celebration in Indianola and workshops with students at Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena. In 2004 the school created the B.B. King Recording Studio in his honor, and in 2008 Mississippi honored one of its favorite sons with the opening of the elaborate B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center in Indianola.

BEALE TOWN BOUND

400 West Park Street, Hernando, Mississippi

The Hernando area was the birthplace of an important group of musicians who helped establish Memphis as a major blues center in the 1920s. These include Jim Jackson, Robert Wilkins, and Dan Sane, who was the partner of Beale Street blues pioneer Frank Stokes. Jug band leader Gus Cannon, who is buried nearby, also performed here before settling in Memphis. Other local natives include George "Mojo" Buford, who played harmonica with the Muddy Waters band, and guitarist Earl Bell.

Jim Jackson was born in Hernando in 1878, placing him among the earliest-born artists to record blues, and worked for many years with traveling medicine shows including the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and Silas Green From New Orleans. His repertoire from these shows was reflected in many of the songs he recorded between 1927 and 1930, such as his colorfully titled "I Heard the Voice of a Porkchop." His most famous song, "Jim Jackson's Kansas City Blues," was widely covered by other artists. Jackson died in Memphis in 1933.

Gus Cannon was born in nearby Red Banks in 1883 or 1884 and was buried in 1979 in the Greenview Memorial Gardens cemetery in north Hernando. As a teenager in the Clarksdale area he was influenced by pioneering slide guitarist Alec Lee and soon began playing the banjo with a slide. Cannon worked regularly as a musician on medicine shows, frequently together with Jim Jackson. He recorded in 1927 as "Banjo Joe" and between 1928 and 1930 made many jug band recordings as leader of Cannon's Jug Stompers. After many years of relative inactivity as a musician Cannon returned to performing in the early '60s after his song "Walk Right In" became a pop hit for the folk group the Rooftop Singers.

In her biography of her grandfather, educator and blues musician Mary Elaine "Lane" Wilkins wrote that Robert "Tim" Wilkins (1896 to 1987) first met Jim Jackson and Gus Cannon in 1912 while they were performing together at Mary Cotton's Place here in the West End of Hernando. Wilkins subsequently moved to Memphis and between 1928 and 1935 recorded eight singles including "Rolling Stone." In the late 1930s Wilkins became a minister in the Church of God in Christ, and in the 1960s he began performing his blues-inflected gospel music on the blues revival circuit. He remade his blues recording "That's No Way To Get Along" into the gospel song "Prodigal Son," which was subsequently covered by the Rolling Stones on their Beggars Banquet album. His son John Wilkins likewise performed and recorded gospel in a similar bluesy style.

Guitarist Dan Sane (also spelled Sain, Saine, or Sains) was born near Hernando in 1892 or 1896. He joined forces with guitarist and vocalist Frank Stokes in Memphis in the early '20s for a partnership that lasted several decades. Stokes and Sane, who were noted for the intricacy of their guitar interplay, recorded over twenty duets as the "Beale Street Sheiks" between 1927 and 1929. Sane, who died in 1965 in Osceola, Arkansas, was the grandfather of the blues/R&B producer and performer Oliver Sain.

BIG JOE WILLIAMS

365 Main Street, Crawford, Mississippi

Joe Lee “Big Joe” Williams (circa 1903 to 1982) epitomized the life and times of the rambunctious, roving bluesman, traveling from coast to coast and around the world playing rugged, rhythmic blues on his nine-string guitar at juke joints, house parties, and concerts. Mentor to blues legends Muddy Waters and Honeyboy Edwards, Williams was born near Crawford, where he also spent his final years. His song “Baby Please Don't Go” has been recorded by many blues and rock bands.

Williams was born about ten miles west of Crawford on the edge of the Noxubee Swamp on October 16, 1903 (or, according to some documents, 1899). Williams came from a family of blues performers that included his grandfather, Bert Logan, and uncles Bert and Russ Logan. He crafted his first instrument, a one-string guitar, and later became known for the nine-string guitar he created by adding three strings to a standard guitar. Joe left home in his teens and made his living playing for workers at railway, turpentine, levee, and logging camps and traveling with minstrel troupes and medicine shows. He came under the influence of Charley Patton in the Mississippi Delta, where he sometimes took young bluesmen Honeyboy Edwards and Muddy Waters on the road with him. He became a staple of the vibrant blues scene in St. Louis in the 1930s and later relocated to Chicago, though he never ceased traveling.

In 1935 Williams recorded his signature song “Baby Please Don't Go,” which was later covered by dozens of artists including Muddy Waters, Van Morrison (with the band Them), and Bob Dylan (who played harmonica on a Big Joe session in 1962). Joe sometimes gave his wife, blues singer Bessie Mae Smith, credit for writing the tune, which was much like the traditional work song “Another Man Done Gone.” Many of Williams's 1930s and '40s recordings for the Bluebird and Columbia labels featured harmonica great John Lee “Sonny Boy” Williamson. When the trends in African American music shifted to electric blues and rhythm and blues styles after World War II, many traditional bluesmen were left behind, but the indefatigable Williams managed to keep recording singles for labels such as Trumpet (based in Jackson, Mississippi), Bullet, and Vee-Jay.

In the late '50s Big Joe began a new career as a “folk blues” artist. He performed widely at coffeehouses, nightclubs, and festivals and recorded many albums for Delmark, Arhoolie, Testament, Bluesville, Folkways, and other labels that were marketed to white collectors and enthusiasts in America and Europe. He was particularly popular in Chicago, where he lived in the basement of the Jazz Record Mart, and his legendary travels and cantankerous personality were captured in guitarist Mike Bloomfield's memoir *Me and Big Joe*. Williams took pride not only in his own music but also in his work as a talent scout. He helped locate and record many artists in Mississippi, St. Louis, and Chicago, including J. D. Short, originally of Port Gibson, and John Wesley “Mr. Shortstuff” Macon. Williams died in Macon on December 17, 1982, and is buried about six miles west of Crawford in Oktibbeha County. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1992.

BIG WALTER HORTON

Center Street, Horn Lake, Mississippi

Blues harmonica virtuoso Big Walter Horton was renowned for his innovative contributions to the music of Memphis and Chicago. Horton was born in Horn Lake on April 6, 1918, and began his career as a child working for tips on the streets of Memphis. He performed and recorded with Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, Willie Dixon, Fleetwood Mac, Johnny Winter, and many others. His technique and tone continue to be studied and emulated by harmonica players around the world.

Horton was heralded as one of the most brilliant and creative musicians ever to play the harmonica. Born on a plantation near this site, as a child he blew into tin cans to create sounds. His birth date is usually cited as April 6, 1918, although some sources give the year as 1917 or 1921. Nicknamed "Shakey" due to nystagmus, an affliction related to eye movement that can result in involuntary head shaking and learning disabilities, Horton quit school in the first grade. He made his way doing odd jobs and playing harmonica with local veterans such as Jack Kelly, Garfield Akers, and Little Buddy Doyle as well as young friends Johnny Shines, Floyd Jones, and Honeyboy Edwards. They performed in Church Park, Handy Park, hotel lobbies, and anywhere else they could earn tips, including nearby areas of Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.

Horton began recording for legendary Memphis producer Sam Phillips in 1951. The first record on Phillips's Sun label in 1952 was assigned to "Jackie Boy and Little Walter" (Jack Kelly and Horton). While Sun never officially released the Kelly-Horton disc, other Horton tracks from Phillips's studio appeared on the Modern and RPM labels under the name of "Mumbles." On later recordings, Walter was usually billed as "Shakey Horton" or "Big Walter."

Horton joined the Muddy Waters band in Chicago in 1953. Chicago's foremost blues producer/songwriter, Willie Dixon, who called Horton "the greatest harmonica player in the world," began recording him for labels including States, Cobra, and Argo, and hired him to play harmonica on sessions by Otis Rush, Koko Taylor, Jimmy Rogers, Sunnyland Slim, and others. Horton also toured and recorded with Willie Dixon's Chicago Blues All Stars, and played on the Fleetwood Mac album Blues Jam in Chicago. Full albums of his work appeared on several labels, including Alligator, Chess, and Blind Pig. Horton toured internationally, but in Chicago most of his work was in small clubs. He also resumed playing the streets for tips at Chicago's Maxwell Street market.

Horton's playing, sometimes powerful and dramatic, other times delicate and sensitive, left an influence on harmonica masters Little Walter (Jacobs) and Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller) and on the generations to follow. His shy, gentle nature, often hidden beneath a gruff or glum exterior, endeared him to many. The uplifting beauty of Horton's music contrasted with the sorrows and tragedies of his personal life. He died of heart failure on December 8, 1981. His death certificate also cited acute alcoholism. Horton was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1982.

BILOXI BLUES

Main and Murray Streets, Biloxi, Mississippi

The Mississippi Coast, long a destination for pleasure seekers, tourists, and gamblers, as well as maritime workers and armed services personnel, developed a flourishing nightlife during the segregation era. While most venues were reserved for whites, this stretch of Main Street catered to the African American trade, and especially during the boom years during and after World War II, dozens of clubs and cafes here rocked to the sounds of blues, jazz, and rhythm and blues.

Biloxi was strutting to the rhythms of cakewalk dances, vaudeville and minstrel show music, dance orchestras, and ragtime pianists by the late 1800s, before blues and jazz had fully emerged. Biloxi's musical culture was particularly influenced by and intertwined with that of New Orleans, and Crescent City jazz pioneers Jelly Roll Morton (1890-1941) and Bill Johnson (c. 1874-1972) lived in Biloxi in the early 1900s before moving on to California, Chicago, and other distant locales. Morton's godmother, reputed to be a voodoo practitioner in New Orleans, had a home in Biloxi. In 1907-08, Morton frequented a Reynoir Street gambling den called the Flat Top, where he used his skills as a pianist, pool player, and card shark to hustle customers, particularly workers who flocked to town from nearby turpentine camps to engage in a game called "Georgia skin." At the Flat Top, Morton recalled, ". . . Nothin' but the blues were played . . . the real lowdown blues, honky tonk blues."

Morton courted a Biloxi woman, Bessie Johnson, whose brothers Bill, Robert, and Ollie ("Dink") were musicians. The Johnsons lived on Delauney Street and later on Croesus Street, just a few blocks west of this site. Bill Johnson's touring unit, the Creole Band, introduced New Orleans ragtime, jazz, and blues to audiences across the country. Bessie later adopted the show business moniker of Anita Gonzales. Other early Biloxi musicians included minstrel show performers Romie and Lamar "Buck" Nelson; drummer Jimmy Bertrand, who recorded with many blues and jazz artists in Chicago; and William Tuncel's Big Four String Band.

In the 1940s, as business on Main Street prospered, clubs featured both traveling acts and local bands, as well as jukeboxes and slot machines. Airmen from Keesler Field participated both as audience members and musicians; Paul Gayten, a noted blues and R&B recording artist, directed the black USO band during World War II, and Billy "The Kid" Emerson, who recorded for the legendary Sun label, served at Keesler in the 1950s. Both Gayten and Emerson got married in Biloxi. Blues/R&B producer-songwriter Sax Kari once operated a record store on the street, and rock 'n' roll star Bo Diddley's brother, Rev. Kenneth Haynes, came to Biloxi to pastor at the Main Street Baptist Church. Local musicians active in later years included Charles Fairley, Cozy Corley, Skin Williams, and bands such as the Kings of Soul, Sounds of Soul, and Carl Gates and the Decks. After a period of decline, local entertainment perked up again in the 1990s as casinos and the Gulf Coast Blues and Heritage Festival brought a new wave of blues and southern soul stars to Biloxi.

BIRTHPLACE OF THE BLUES?

Highway 8, Dockery, Mississippi

The precise origins of the blues are lost to time, but one of the primal centers for the music in Mississippi was Dockery Farms. For nearly three decades the plantation was intermittently the home of Charley Patton (circa 1891 to 1934), the most important early Delta blues musician. Patton himself learned from fellow Dockery resident Henry Sloan and influenced many other musicians who came here, including Howlin' Wolf, Willie Brown, Tommy Johnson, and Roebuck "Pops" Staples.

One of the most important plantations in the Delta, it founded in 1895 by William Alfred "Will" Dockery (1865 to 1936). Dockery purchased thousands of acres bordering the Sunflower River and worked for years to clear the swampy woodlands. At its peak Dockery Farms was essentially a self-sufficient town with an elementary school, churches, post and telegraph offices, its own currency, resident doctor, railroad depot, ferry, blacksmith shop, cotton gin, cemeteries, picnic grounds for the workers, and a commissary that sold dry goods, furniture, and groceries. In the early 20th century Dockery housed four hundred tenant families, most of whom were African Americans who migrated to the region in pursuit of work. Will Dockery earned a reputation for treating his tenants fairly, and many resided there for long periods of time.

One such family was that of Bill Patton, Jr. and his wife Annie, who moved here with their five children from the Bolton/Edwards area east of Vicksburg in the early 1900s. The Pattons were relatively prosperous and well educated—Bill Patton later bought his own land and operated a country store in nearby Renova—and their son Charley (born between 1885 and 1891, according to various records) decided to pursue a life in music. He was inspired by an older guitarist, Henry Sloan, who like the Patton family had moved to Dockery from the Bolton area. By around 1910 Patton was himself influencing other musicians, including his longtime partner Willie Brown; Tommy Johnson, who became the most influential musician in the Jackson area; Howlin' Wolf, who took guitar lessons from Patton after moving to the area as a teen and later recorded a version of Patton's "Pony Blues"; and Roebuck "Pops" Staples, who later led the popular gospel group the Staple Singers. Historians have traced so much blues back to Patton and his contemporaries around Dockery and Drew that the area is regarded by some as the wellspring of Delta blues.

Patton was a popular performer in the region among both whites and blacks, and at Dockery he often played on the porch of the commissary and at all-night picnics hosted by Will Dockery for residents. He began recording in 1929, and many of the songs he recorded addressed daily life and events in the Delta, including some at Dockery. In "34 Blues" Patton sang of being banished from Dockery by plantation manager Herman Jett, apparently because Patton was running off with various tenants' women. Patton's "Pea Vine Blues" referred to a train line that ran from Dockery westward to Boyle, where it connected with the "Yellow Dog" line that led to Cleveland and points beyond. Some of Patton's relatives continued to live and work at Dockery, and though he roamed the Delta and beyond playing the blues and sometimes preaching, Dockery was his most regular stopping point. Patton died of mitral valve disorder on April 28, 1934, near Indianola.

BLACK PRAIRIE BLUES

Green and Jefferson Streets, Macon, Mississippi

The roots of blues and gospel music run deep in the African American culture of the Black Prairie region. Among the performers born near Macon here in Noxubee County, Eddy Clearwater, Carey Bell, and Jesse Fortune went on to achieve renown in Chicago blues, while Brother Joe May moved to East St. Louis and starred as a gospel singer. In Prairie Point near the Mississippi-Alabama state line, Willie King kindled a new blues movement as the political prophet of the juke joints.

African American music in Noxubee County dates back to antebellum days when slaves sang spirituals and work songs on local cotton plantations. Slaves who learned banjo or fiddle also served as entertainers at white social affairs. This musical legacy carried over into the 20th century, when African American family string bands featuring fiddle, guitar, and mandolin performed for both white and black audiences. Such bands included the Duck Brothers (Charlie, Albert, and Vandy Duck), the Salt and Pepper Shakers (Perie, Doc, and Preston Spiller), and the Nickersons (featuring fiddler Booger Nickerson).

Another Macon fiddler, Houston H. Harrington (1924 to 1972), guided his family, including sons Joe and Vernon Harrington and nephew Eddy "Clearwater" Harrington, towards careers in the blues after they relocated to Chicago in the early 1950s. Harrington, a part-time preacher and inventor, used a portable disc-cutting machine to make recordings in Macon. In Chicago he produced records by Clearwater and others for his Atomic-H label. Clearwater, born east of Macon in 1935, went on to entertain audiences around the world with a flamboyant blues and rock 'n' roll act.

Harmonica virtuoso Carey Bell, a Macon native whose real surname was also Harrington, likewise attained worldwide fame after moving to Chicago. Bell (1936 to 2007) played with Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon, among others, and fathered a brood of blues musicians, including renowned guitarist Lurrie Bell and harmonica protege Steve Bell. Vocalist Jesse Fortune, born near Macon in 1930, also embarked on a lengthy blues career in Chicago in the 1950s. In the gospel field, Brother Joe May (1912 to 1972) and Robert Blair (1927 to 2001) built successful careers after leaving Macon.

Although professional musical opportunities were scant, blues singers continued to play house parties and juke joints around Macon, Brooksville, Shuqualak, Mashulaville, and Prairie Point. Big Joe Williams (1903 to 1982), one of the most prominent blues artists from the Black Prairies, came from Crawford to perform in Noxubee County at times. Williams and fellow bluesman John Wesley "Mr. Shortstuff" Macon (circa 1923 to 1973) died in Macon, and guitarist Elijah Brown, another friend of Williams, was born here. Willie King (born in the Grass Hill area in 1943) later led a revival of the local blues tradition and drew widespread acclaim for his political "struggling songs," an outgrowth of his civil rights activities in Alabama. In Brooksville, performers active on the local music scene have included Robert Earl Greathree and Brown Sugar.

BLUE FRONT CAFE

Railroad Avenue, Bentonia, Mississippi

The Blue Front Café opened in 1948 under the ownership of Carey and Mary Holmes, an African American couple from Bentonia. In its heyday the Blue Front was famed for its buffalo fish, blues, and moonshine whiskey. One of the couple's sons, Jimmy Holmes, took over the café in 1970 and continued to operate it as an informal, down-home blues venue that gained international fame among blues enthusiasts.

During the 1980s and '90s the Blue Front Café began to attract tourists in search of authentic blues in a rustic setting. In its early years, the café was a local gathering spot for crowds of workers from the Yazoo County cotton fields. Carey and Mary Holmes raised their ten children and three nephews and sent most of them to college on the income generated by the café and their cotton crops. The café offered hot meals, groceries, drinks, recreation, entertainment, and even haircuts.

The Holmes family operated under a tangled set of local rules during the segregation era. The Blue Front was subject to a 10 p.m. town curfew, but at the height of cotton gathering and ginning season, the café might stay open 24 hours a day to serve shifts of workers around the clock. The Blue Front could not serve Coca-Cola, however, nor could black customers purchase it or other items reserved for whites anywhere in Bentonia; African Americans were allowed only brands such as Nehi and Double Cola. Still, white customers regularly bought bootleg corn liquor at the back door of the café. After integration, the Blue Front boasted its own Coca-Cola sign.

Music at the Blue Front was often impromptu and unannounced. The café seldom advertised or formally booked acts. Many itinerant harmonica players and guitarists drifted through to play a few tunes, but at times the musical cast included such notables as Skip James, Jack Owens, Henry Stuckey, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller), and James "Son" Thomas.

Local musicians who have played at the Blue Front also include harmonica players Bud Spires, Son Johnson, Bobby Batton, Alonzo (Lonzy) Wilkerson, and Cleo Pullman; guitarists Cornelius Bright, Jacob Stuckey, Dodd Stuckey, Tommy Lee West, owner Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, his brother John, their uncle Percy Smith, and cousin Otha Holmes; and, on special occasions, bands from Jackson led by Eddie Rasberry or Roosevelt Roberts. Musicians also performed at Carey Holmes's outdoor gatherings on the family farm, which later evolved into the Bentonia Blues Festival, sponsored by Jimmy Holmes. In 2000, Mary Alice Holmes Towner, Jimmy's sister, also organized a blues and gospel festival in Marks, Mississippi.

Jimmy Holmes's first two CDs, released in 2006 and 2007, were recorded at the Blue Front, perpetuating the music he learned in Bentonia from Jack Owens and others.

BLUES AND JAZZ IN THE PASS

Davis Avenue and East Scenic Drive, Pass Christian, Mississippi

The histories of blues and jazz are often traced along separate pathways, but, especially on the Gulf Coast, the two genres were intertwined from the earliest days. Blues was a key element in the music of Pass Christian's illustrious native son Captain John Handy (1900-1971) and other locals who played traditional jazz or rhythm and blues. Pass Christian has celebrated its rich African American musical heritage with various festivals, including "Jazz in the Pass," first held here in 1999.

Captain John Handy is celebrated as an exemplary performer of traditional New Orleans jazz, but his innovative and forceful work on the alto saxophone also inspired rhythm and blues pioneers Louis Jordan and Earl Bostic. Handy began playing drums around age twelve in a band with his father, violinist John Handy, and his younger brothers Sylvester and Julius. In Pass Christian, where bands often entertained at beachfront resort hotels, the brothers worked as a trio, with John on mandolin, performing for dinner patrons at the Miramar Hotel, among others, and serenading locals at their homes. Handy later began playing clarinet and moved to New Orleans after World War One with local trumpeter and bandleader Tom Albert. In 1928 he took up alto saxophone and later he and his brother Sylvester formed the Louisiana Shakers and toured throughout the region. In New Orleans Handy collaborated with the Young Tuxedo Jazz Band, Kid Clayton, Lee Collins, Kid Sheik Cola, and others. Handy reputedly earned his nickname "Captain" from his authoritative style of bandleading and directing rehearsals. Widespread fame came late in life to Handy, who did not record until 1960, but during his last decade he recorded several albums and played often at Preservation Hall, in addition to touring the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan.

Music was a family affair among other local musicians as well. The Watson Brothers—Harry, Eddie, Henry ("Gator"), and Charlie—had what was known in its early years as a "spasm band," featuring homemade instruments and gadgets. Eddie Watson later worked with Handy's Louisiana Shakers. At times the Watsons' group included pianists Anita Jackson and her brother, Joseph "Joe B." Jackson, Jr., who also led his own group, "Jobie Jackson's Band," which featured John Handy on alto. The Jacksons' father, Joe, Sr., played with local bands including that of August Saucier. Pianist Jeannette Salvant Kimball also played with the Watsons before joining Papa Celestin's band in New Orleans. She later performed at the Dew Drop Inn and Preservation Hall.

A popular local blues, R&B, and rock 'n' roll band of the 1950s called the Claudetts included, at various times, brothers Lawrence ("Sonny") and Earl Wimberley (whose father, Johnny Wimberley, played in New Orleans' Olympia Brass Band), Arthur Arnold, John Farris III, Joe Welch, Jackie Avery (later a prolific R&B songwriter), Roland Bowser, Nolan Harris, and Irvan and James Baker. Sonny Wimberley, a singer and bassist, moved to Chicago, where he played in Muddy Waters' blues band and led his own group, the Sunglows. Saxophonist Donald "Cadillac" Henry also played with the Claudetts and later worked in promotion and management with Z. Z. Hill, Otis Redding, and other artists. Among the local clubs that featured blues, jazz, and R&B were the Dixie, the Savoy, and the P. C. Club, where John Handy gave his final rousing performance at a jam session.

BO DIDDLEY

112 North Railroad Boulevard, McComb, Mississippi

Acclaimed as a founder of rock 'n' roll, Bo Diddley (Ellas Bates McDaniel) was born near Magnolia, south of McComb, on December 30, 1928. Diddley wrote and recorded such hits as "I'm a Man," "Bo Diddley," "Say Man," and "Road Runner." The distinctive rhythm of his "Bo Diddley" beat and his pioneering use of electronic distortion were widely influential. His songs have been covered by Buddy Holly, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Eric Clapton, and many others.

Bo Diddley, one of the most unconventional yet influential figures in the history of American popular music, was born in Pike County, the son of Ethel Wilson and Eugene Bates. In the mid 1930s he moved to Chicago with his mother's cousin, Gussie McDaniel, who had raised him from an early age. In Chicago he took up the violin and at age twelve received his first guitar. His unique approach to guitar, he recalled, stemmed largely from his attempts to imitate the sound of a bow on a violin.

As a teen Diddley began playing for tips on the streets and eventually in clubs with groups that included blues recording artists Jody Williams and Billy Boy Arnold. To achieve his own sound, Diddley rebuilt guitar amplifiers, constructed a tremolo unit out of a clock spring and automobile parts, and enhanced the group's rhythm by adding maracas and drums.

In 1955 Diddley made his first single for Chicago's Checker Records. Both sides were hits: "I'm A Man" was a bold declaration of pride at a time when many whites referred to an African American man derogatorily as "boy," and was covered by Muddy Waters as "Manish Boy," while the flip side, "Bo Diddley," spotlighted his trademark beat, which was similar to a traditional African American slapping rhythm known as "hambone." Diddley said he traced his variation back to Pentecostal church services, and his younger brother, the Reverend Kenneth Haynes, recalled Bo singing the rhythm as a child. The name "Bo Diddley" was used by various black vaudeville performers prior to his birth and was suggested as a more colorful stage name than Ellas McDaniel when he recorded.

Diddley, Fats Domino, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry were among the few African American artists to achieve crossover stardom in the 1950s rock'n'roll market, and many bands adopted Diddley's songs and beat. Diddley's guitar sound became part of the basic vocabulary of rock, influencing guitarists including Link Wray, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page, and The Who's Pete Townshend, while his early '70s funk recordings have been sampled by hip hop artists such as De la Soul and Method Man.

A member of the Blues, Rock and Roll, and Rockabilly Halls of Fame, Diddley received Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, and the Mississippi Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. *Rolling Stone* magazine's "100 Greatest Artists of All Time" list in 2004 included Bo Diddley at number 20.

BOBBY RUSH

Lynch Street and Valley, Jackson, Mississippi

Bobby Rush, a Louisiana native who lived for decades in Chicago, earned the title “king of the chitlin circuit” after relocating to Jackson in 1982. Rush's distinctive “folk funk” style, featured on his recordings for the Jackson-based LaJam label and others, bridged the blues he heard as a youth and modern soul music. His upbeat and often provocative live shows established him as a favorite among southern soul and blues audiences and later brought him international acclaim.

Bobby Rush was born Emmett Ellis, Jr., on November 10, 1935, in Homer, Louisiana, and at eleven moved with his family to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He eventually took the stage name “Bobby Rush” out of respect for his father, who was a preacher. Rush built his first instrument, a one-stringed “diddley bow,” and by his teens was donning a fake mustache and playing at local juke joints and on the road with bluesmen including Elmore James, Boyd Gilmore, and John “Big Moose” Walker. After moving to Chicago in the 1950s, he worked with Earl Hooker, Luther Allison, and Freddie King. Rush, who played guitar, bass, and harmonica, developed a lively and sometimes risqué stage act that blended music, dance, and comedy. His musical approach—which he later coined “folk funk”—married various contemporary sounds with lyrical themes that often borrowed from African American folklore and traditional blues. He achieved renown for his entrepreneurial flair by working multiple gigs the same night and sometimes collecting double pay by disguising himself as an emcee at his own shows. He also booked and promoted many shows himself rather than working through an agency.

Rush's initial 45 rpm singles appeared in the 1960s on various Chicago labels, including Jerry-O, Salem, and Checker. His first national hit was “Chicken Heads” on the Galaxy label in 1971. Jewel, ABC, Warner Brothers, and London also released Rush 45s, and his first LP appeared on Philadelphia International. In 1982 he began recording for LaJam, a Jackson label owned by Como native James Bennett, who recorded blues, gospel, and R&B acts for his J&B, Traction, Retta's, MT, Big Thigh, and “T” labels. Rush also moved from Illinois to Jackson in order to be closer to his largely southern fan base. He scored a hit with “Sue” on LaJam and maintained a strong following on the southern soul circuit during the following decades with his tireless rounds of performances and further hits on LaJam, Urgent!, and the Jackson-based Waldoxy label, including “What's Good For the Goose (Is Good For the Gander Too),” “Hen Pecked,” “I Ain't Studdin' You,” “Hoochie Man,” “Booga Bear,” “A Man Can Give It (But He Can't Take It),” and “You, You, You (Know What to Do).”

In the 1990s Rush began to “cross over” to white audiences, and in 2003 his dynamic stage show was captured in Richard Pearce's documentary *The Road To Memphis*, part of the PBS series *Martin Scorsese Presents The Blues*. The same year Rush formed his own Deep Rush label, on which he released special projects including a DVD, *Live at Ground Zero*, and an acoustic album, *Raw*. A recipient of multiple blues awards, Rush was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2006.

BOOKER “BUKKA” WHITE

Joe Brigrance Park, Woodland Circle, Houston, Mississippi

Houston area native Booker T. Washington White (circa 1904 to 1977) was one of the most expressive vocalists and powerful slide guitarists in the blues. A remarkable lyricist as well, he recorded such classics as “Shake ‘Em On Down” and “Fixin’ to Die Blues” between 1930 and 1940 under the names Washington White or Bukka White. An important influence on his cousin B. B. King, White enjoyed a second career as a performer and recording artist beginning in 1963.

White recalled, in a 1976 interview with Robin Mathis of Houston radio station WCPC, that he was born about five miles south of Houston on the farm of Willie Harrington. Various documents list his birth date as November 12, between 1900 and 1909, but the earliest census data suggest 1904. His father John White, a multi-instrumentalist who performed at local gatherings, gave him his first guitar and other local musicians taught him his signature bottleneck slide technique. He further developed his skills on guitar and piano during stays in Tallahatchie County (in the Delta) and St. Louis. At sixteen White married for the first of several times, but was soon back to rambling across the South and Midwest.

Recording agent Ralph Lembo of Itta Bena arranged for White to record his first blues and gospel songs in 1930 in Memphis. In 1937 White recorded a minor hit, “Shake ‘Em On Down,” in Chicago, but that year he was also sentenced for a shooting incident to Parchman Penitentiary, where John Lomax of the Library of Congress recorded him in 1939. After his release White recorded twelve of his best-known songs at a Chicago session in 1940. During the war he settled in Memphis and worked at a defense plant. In Memphis he also performed with blues legend Frank Stokes, among others, and helped his cousin B.B. King become established on the local music scene. After he began to tour and record again in the 1960s White, still a skilled and energetic performer, became a popular figure on the folk music circuit and traveled as far as Mexico and Europe. On May 27, 1976, White returned to Houston as the featured artist at the city’s bicentennial celebration. He died in Memphis on February 26, 1977.

Other notable singers from the Houston area include brothers Cleave (born c. 1928) and Clay Graham (b. 1936) of the famed gospel group the Pilgrim Jubilees, who were raised in the Horse Nation community. Otho Lee Gaines (1914-1987) of Buena Vista was the founder and bass singer of the popular vocal group the Delta Rhythm Boys. Milan Williams (1948 to 2006) of Okolona was a founding member and keyboardist of the R&B group the Commodores, and wrote or cowrote many of their songs. Other blues artists from the area include vocalist Willie Buck (born 1937) of Houston and guitarist C. D. Dobbs (1917 to 1993) of Okolona. The music of famous Chickasaw County native Bobbie Gentry (born Roberta Lee Streeter in 1944 and best known as a pop or country singer) borrowed heavily from soul and blues. In turn, her classic 1967 recording, “Ode to Billie Joe,” has been performed by countless African American soul, blues, and jazz performers.

BROADCASTING THE BLUES

10211 Southpark Drive, Gulfport, Mississippi

Blues radio took off in the post-World War II era with the arrival of rhythm & blues programming. A new era for blues radio began in 2000 when Rip Daniels, a Gulfport native, launched the American Blues Network (ABN) at this site. Using satellite and Internet technology, ABN provided a mix of modern and vintage blues to listeners around the world.

Radio emerged as the primary medium for the dissemination of music, advertisements, and news to the African American community during the 1940s and '50s. In Mississippi, the earliest radio stations to broadcast black music, usually in the form of local groups singing gospel or traditional harmonies live in the studios, included WQBC in Vicksburg, WGRM in Greenwood, and WJPC in Greenville. In the 1940s, Sonny Boy Williamson number 2 (Rice Miller) brought the blues to audiences throughout the Delta via his live broadcasts from KFFA in Helena, Arkansas, and later from WROX in Clarksdale, WAZF in Yazoo City, and other stations. Among the first African American radio announcers in Mississippi were Early Wright, Jerome Stampley, Bruce Payne, William Harvey, and Charles Evers.

In 1949 WDIA in Memphis became the first station in the country to go to an all-black format. By the early '50s a number of Mississippi radio stations were broadcasting the blues as a component of their wide-ranging program schedules, which were designed to reach entire local communities rather than specializing in certain genres or formats. The buying power of Mississippi's large African American population spurred more blues and rhythm & blues air time, which was often sponsored by local businesses advertising groceries, furniture, or medicinal tonics. On September 17, 1954, WOKJ in Jackson became the first Mississippi station to institute full-time black-oriented programming.

Not until WORV went on the air in Hattiesburg on June 7, 1969, however, did Mississippi have an African American-owned station. When radio veteran and blues promoter Stan "Rip" Daniels launched WJDZ radio in Gulfport on March 20, 1994, it became the first African American-owned FM station on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. According to the 2007 Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook, Mississippi had more stations (thirteen) regularly broadcasting under a blues format than any other state. In addition, specialized blues programs have been aired on various college, public, rock, oldies, and urban contemporary stations.

Daniels took the blues concept a step further on October 1, 2000, when the American Blues Network transmitted its first satellite signals from the WJDZ studios. Adopting a primary format of "party blues and oldies," the ABN secured affiliations with dozens of stations across the country and put its programs on the internet as well. Daniels's concert promotions also ensured support of the blues and southern soul performers on the Gulf Coast "chitlin' circuit."

BUD SCOTT

407 Main Street, Natchez, Mississippi

Clarence “Bud” Scott, Sr., led one of the most popular dance bands in the Mississippi-Louisiana region for several decades beginning around 1900. Scott (1876-1938), a lifelong Natchez resident, was renowned among both white and black audiences. Although the dances were segregated, the entire community could hear Scott when he sang from the balcony of the Natchez Confectionery at this site. Scott’s son, Clarence, Jr., (1908-1940), also known as Bud, led the band in its later years.

Bud Scott was the most famous African American musician in Mississippi during the early decades of the twentieth century. Across the state and in Louisiana, newspapers that rarely covered African Americans advertised and reported his appearances in glowing terms; some ads promoted his band as “the best orchestra in the South—bar none.” The 1938 Federal Writers’ Project called him “Mississippi’s own pioneer in jazz” and named him among the six most nationally prominent Mississippi-born musicians. He achieved such stature strictly through his legendary live performances—he apparently never made a record or published his songs. Scott was in demand for the busy Natchez schedule of society affairs at mansions, hotels, clubs, and halls, as well as on riverboats. He played for three U.S. presidents and entertained throughout the region at pageants, military balls, political rallies, conventions, graduations, rodeos, town pavilions, ballrooms, theaters, and fairs. A New Orleans reporter later reminisced, “In Mississippi, a Bud Scott dance was to die for.” Serenading was another Natchez tradition championed by Scott’s band and others who played on the steps of antebellum homes and also strolled the black neighborhoods.

Scott, born on October 25, 1876, was also known as “Professor,” a title accorded respected orchestra leaders of the era. Best known for his singing, he was also a composer who played mandolin and other instruments. His band, which often carried twelve to fifteen pieces, used various names, including the Syncopators and, on one 1902 theatrical bill, Bud Scott and his Senegambian Assistants. The group kept pace with the times, evolving from a ragtime string band into a hot jazz outfit and then a swing orchestra with a horn section. Such bands’ repertoires commonly included blues, rendered as both vocals and instrumentals, and Scott’s versatility extended from ballads to cakewalks to the latest Broadway hits.

Several band members, including Scott’s son Clarence Jr., son-in-law Walter King, Jim Ferguson, and Alonzo Skillens, lived at or next to Scott’s house on Union Street. Pianist Tom Griffin was among the bandsmen who went on to lead their own groups or perform as featured acts. Other bands active in Natchez by the 1930s included Monk Hoggatt and his Revelers and the Otis Smith Orchestra. Scott, who died on November 23, 1938, was in poor health in his final years and unable to sing, but Bud Scott, Jr., and the band continued to perform. Scott, Jr., was preparing for an upcoming show with the band in Greenville when he perished in the famous Rhythm Club fire of April 23, 1940. Arthur “Bud” Scott (1890-1949), a renowned New Orleans jazz musician, was not related, but biographies of the various Bud Scotts have often been confused.

CASSANDRA WILSON

Ridgeway and Albermarle Road, Jackson, Mississippi

Grammy Award-winning jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson, a native of Jackson, is known for her broad explorations of various forms of music, including the blues. Her recordings include versions of songs by Delta blues artists Robert Johnson, Son House, and Muddy Waters. Wilson's father, bassist Herman Fowlkes, Jr., was a leading musician on the Jackson jazz scene. He recorded with Sonny Boy Williamson number 2 and other blues artists. Wilson grew up here on Albemarle Road.

Wilson was declared "America's best singer" by *Time* magazine in 2001, in recognition not only of her great accomplishments in jazz but also of her creative approaches to a broad range of music, including the blues. Born Cassandra Marie Fowlkes on December 4, 1955, Wilson first learned clarinet and in her late teens made her professional debut playing folk songs on the guitar. While attending Jackson State University she played guitar and sang with Past, Present, Future, which included fellow students Rhonda Richmond on violin, Yvonne "Niece" Evers on congas, and Nellie "Mack" McMinnis on bass. She also played in local groups including Let's Eat and These Days, and worked with local musicians Jesse Robinson, Willie Silas, Bernard Jenkins, Claude Wells, and others.

Wilson began singing modern jazz after encouragement by drummer Alvin Fielder, a native of Meridian and a founding member, along with John Reese, of the local Black Arts Music Society. In 1981 Wilson moved to New Orleans, where she performed with jazz musicians Earl Turbington and Ellis Marsalis, and the following year relocated to New York City, where she began a long relationship with the experimental jazz collective M-Base, led by saxophonist Steve Coleman. She recorded her first album in 1986 for the German JMT label and in 1993 she signed with the prestigious Blue Note label. Her Blue Note albums brought Wilson international acclaim as well as Grammy Awards for *New Moon Daughter* (1996) and *Loverly* (2003).

Wilson's father, Herman Fowlkes, Jr. (1918 to 1993), played an integral role in an under-documented Jackson jazz/R&B scene that produced national figures Teddy Edwards, Freddie Waits, Dick Griffin, and Mel Brown, and local luminaries such as brothers Kermit, Jr., Bernard, and Sherrill Holly. Fowlkes, a native of the Chicago area, played trumpet in a U. S. Army band and in 1948 came to Jackson, where he studied at Jackson State together with music professor William W. "Prof" Davis. Fowlkes was one of the first Mississippi musicians to play electric bass, beginning in 1952. He performed locally in the bands of Carlia "Duke" Oatis, Clarence "Duke" Huddleston, Joe Dyson, Bernard "Bunny" Williams, and O'Neal Hudson, and worked in jazz and blues combos with musicians including Andy Hardwick, Willie Silas, Charles Fairley, and Al Clark. He toured briefly as the bassist in blues balladeer Ivory Joe Hunter's band and occasionally accompanied national stars, including Sam Cooke and Gatemouth Brown, on local shows. Fowlkes played bass on recording sessions for Trumpet Records with bluesmen Sonny Boy Williamson and Jerry McCain in 1953 and also recalled recording with New Orleans singer Lloyd Price and others.

CHARLES EVERS AND THE BLUES

Main Street and Medgar Evers Boulevard, Fayette, Mississippi

In 1973 Mayor Charles Evers of Fayette and B. B. King began to cosponsor concerts at the Medgar Evers Homecoming in honor of the slain civil rights activist. Dozens of blues, soul, and gospel acts performed at the annual festival during subsequent decades. Charles Evers's formal involvement in blues began in 1954 when he became one of the first African American deejays in Mississippi at WHOC in Philadelphia. In 1987 he began a long tenure as manager of WMPR in Jackson.

Evers, entrepreneur, civil rights leader, and politician, was born in Decatur, Mississippi, on September 11, 1922, three years before his brother, activist Medgar Evers. Following service in World War II the brothers attended Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (later Alcorn State University), where they became involved in civil rights activities. In 1951 Charles Evers moved to Philadelphia, Mississippi, where he worked at a family-run funeral home and operated a taxi service, a bootleg liquor business, and the Evers Hotel and Lounge, which featured blues bands. After the funeral home advertised on WHOC radio, station owner Howard Cole asked Evers to start hosting a show himself. Evers played blues records and also encouraged his African American listeners to register to vote. His brother Medgar took a position with the NAACP in Jackson and became Mississippi's most prominent civil rights figure. In Philadelphia, segregationist threats to Charles Evers's businesses and family became so severe that he moved his family to Chicago in 1956.

In Chicago Evers was industrious in both legitimate businesses and vice, as he candidly described in his autobiography, *Have No Fear: A Black Man's Fight for Respect in America*. His nightclubs, the Club Mississippi and the Subway Lounge in Chicago and the Palm Gardens in the suburb of Argo, featured Mississippi-born blues artists such as Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and B. B. King. After Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson on June 12, 1963, Charles Evers returned to his home state, where he succeeded his brother as field secretary of the NAACP. Evers organized boycotts, protests, and registration campaigns, and in 1969 Fayette elected him as the first African American mayor of a racially mixed town in Mississippi in the post-Reconstruction era.

To commemorate the tenth anniversary of the murder of Medgar Evers, B. B. King encouraged Charles Evers to found the annual Medgar Evers Homecoming, which featured several days of concerts, parades, and other activities in Fayette and Jackson. Over the following decades the multi-day celebration, also known as the Mississippi Homecoming, took place in various locations across the state including the Evers-owned nightclubs the Fountain Lounge in Fayette and the E&E Lounge in Jackson, as well as his Tri-County Park in Pickens. In addition to annual visits by King and lineups of leading blues, R&B, and gospel acts, celebrities including Muhammad Ali, Kris Kristofferson, Shirley MacLaine, and Dick Gregory participated in the events. Under Evers's management Jackson public radio station WMPR became a primary outlet for blues in both its musical programming and sponsor-underwritten concert and festival announcements, while Evers continued to address political issues on his long-running show, "Let's Talk."

CHARLEY PATTON

Holly Ridge Road, Holly Ridge, Mississippi

The most important figure in the pioneering era of Delta blues, Charley Patton (1891 to 1934), helped define not only the musical genre but also the image and lifestyle of the rambling Mississippi bluesman. He roamed the Delta using Dockery as his most frequent base, and lived his final year in Holly Ridge. Patton and blues singers Willie James Foster (1921-2000) and Asie Payton (1937-1997) are buried in this cemetery.

Patton has been called the Founder of the Delta Blues. He blazed a trail as the music's preeminent entertainer and recording artist during the first third of the 20th century. Born between Bolton and Edwards, Mississippi, in April 1891, Patton was of mixed black, white and native American ancestry. In the early 1900s his family moved to the Dockery plantation. Patton's travels took him from Louisiana to New York, but he spent most of his time moving from plantation to plantation, entertaining fieldhands at jukehouse dances and country stores, acquiring numerous wives and girlfriends along the way. The emotional sway he held over his audiences caused him to be tossed off of more than one plantation, because workers would leave crops unattended to listen to him play.

Although Patton was roughly five feet, five inches tall and only weighed 135 pounds, his gravelly, high-energy singing style made him sound like a man twice his size. An accomplished and inventive guitarist and lyricist, he was a flamboyant showman as well, spinning his guitar, playing it behind his head and slapping it for rhythmic effect. He also preached in local churches, played for the deacons of New Jerusalem M.B. Church here and recorded religious songs, folk ballads, dance tunes, and pop songs.

His most popular and influential record was the Paramount release that paired "Pony Blues" with "Banty Rooster Blues." Other Patton songs were noteworthy for their references to specific people, places and topical events in the Delta. "High Water Everywhere," a dramatic two-part account of the death and despair wrought by the great 1927 flood, is often regarded as his masterpiece. His songs offered social commentary and provided propulsive music for dancing.

Patton sometimes employed multiple spoken voices to create his own cast of characters. While he was an inspiration to many musicians, including Howlin' Wolf, Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson, Willie Brown, Roebuck "Pops" Staples, Bukka White, Honeyboy Edwards, and even Bob Dylan, the individualistic quality of his singing and playing was so inimitable that relatively few blues artists ever attempted to record Patton songs. Patton's last wife, Bertha Lee, lived with him in Holly Ridge and recorded with him at his final session in New York for Vocalion Records in 1934. Patton died of mitral valve disorder at the age of 43.

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE

Court Square and Washington Street, Kosciusko, Mississippi

World-renowned harmonica virtuoso Charlie Musselwhite was born in Kosciusko on January 31, 1944. His great uncle, Lamar Coalson, once owned the store that occupied this site. Musselwhite began playing in Memphis and rose to prominence in Chicago, where he was befriended and mentored in the 1960s by many blues musicians who had also migrated from Mississippi. A perennial winner of blues awards and polls, he received a Mississippi Governor's Award in 2000.

Charlie Musselwhite lived with his family at the corner of North and Wells streets in Kosciusko until they moved to Memphis in the fall of 1947, when he was three. He often returned to visit relatives here and in the Delta, and after he began headlining blues festivals in the area in the 1990s, he invested in property in Clarksdale.

Attracted to the blues as a teenager in Memphis, Musselwhite learned guitar and harmonica and sought out the blues singers he had read about in the book *The Country Blues* by Sam Charters (who later produced Musselwhite's debut album). Will Shade, Furry Lewis, and Memphis Willie B. (Borum) became his first mentors. In November of 1962 Musselwhite moved to Chicago in search of employment, first settling in the Uptown area where many white southern migrants lived. He was soon immersed in the African American music and lifestyle of the South Side, however, and in 1964 he moved there to be closer to the blues. In 1963 to 1964 he also roomed at the Jazz Record Mart and the Old Wells Record Shop with Big Joe Williams, one of many former Mississippians residing in the Windy City. Others, including Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Big Walter Horton, and Magic Sam, also became close friends with Musselwhite, who later cited Horton, Williams, Homesick James, and John Lee Granderson as the bluesmen who taught him the most. He also acknowledged Little Walter and Robert Nighthawk as major influences.

As Musselwhite's reputation grew as a performer in the blues clubs, Sam Charters invited him to record for the Vanguard label. His *Stand Back!* album of 1967 created such a stir, especially among audiences that were just discovering the blues as a voice of the '60s counterculture in California, that Musselwhite relocated to the San Francisco area in August of that year. A number of fellow Chicagoans including Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield also made the westward move, as did Musselwhite's friend John Lee Hooker from Detroit.

Although many white musicians had already adapted the blues into their country, rock 'n' roll, jazz, or folk music styles, Musselwhite always maintained a blues persona even while exploring a variety of American and world music genres. His trend-setting dedication to blues made him a role model, especially among harmonica players on the West Coast. Over the next four decades Musselwhite toured the world and recorded some thirty albums, many of which earned W. C. Handy Awards or Grammy nominations. When he and his wife, Henrietta, were married on January 26, 1981, in San Francisco, John Lee Hooker served as his best man.

CHRISMAN STREET

210 South Chrisman Street, Cleveland, Mississippi

During the segregation era many towns in Mississippi had a particular street that served as the center of African American business and social life, catering not only to townfolk but to farm hands and sharecroppers from the countryside who came to shop and celebrate on weekends. Cleveland's major black thoroughfare, South Chrisman Street, was lined with nightclubs, cafes, hotels, churches, stores, homes, and offices. Its most famous night spot was the Harlem Inn.

South Chrisman Street was once a hub of activity for residents of Bolivar County, which in the 1920 census was not only the most populous county in the state at 57,669 (82.4 percent black), but also the one with the most African American tenant farmers. As the cotton economy boomed, many African Americans moved to the Delta from Hinds County and other areas to work on local plantations, including the family of Charley Patton, who became the leading figure in early Mississippi blues. Patton and his partner Willie Brown were familiar figures in Cleveland and surrounding communities. Cleveland-born guitarist Ernest "Whiskey Red" Brown claimed that he, Patton, and Brown learned from a local guitarist named Earl Harris. Other early area musicians included Jake Martin, Jimmy and Otis Harris, Louie Black, Andrew Moore, and Patton's most famous protégé, Howlin' Wolf, who played in Cleveland both on the streets and in the Coconut Grove and Harlem Inn nightclubs. In his autobiography, *The Father of the Blues*, W. C. Handy wrote that he was enlightened to the value of the Delta's "native music" in Cleveland when he witnessed a local trio being showered with coins (c. 1905). Later blues and R&B performers from Cleveland have included Monroe Jones, the Pearl Street Jumpers, Damon Davis, George Washington, Jr., Little Johnny Christian, Barkin' Bill Smith, the East Side Jumpers, and Norman Burke, Jr.

Leslie and Virdie Hugger opened the Harlem Inn at 718 S. Chrisman in 1935 with no running water and only an outhouse in the back, but they eventually expanded it into a popular hotel, nightclub, pool hall, and eatery. Musicians, including traveling minstrel show bands, sometimes stayed at the hotel and played for their room and board. Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Ike Turner, Rufus Thomas, Memphis Slim, Joe and Jimmy Liggins, Fats Domino, B. B. King, Bobby Bland, and many others also played the club, according to Virdie Hugger. Other venues in the "Low End" section of town on Chrisman or at the intersection of Cross Street and Chrisman included the Hurricane Cafe, Swing Inn Club, Rock & Roll Center, Blue Note Café, Booker T. Theatre, Seals' Café, Club 36, Club 66, Club Oasis, Happyland Café & Hotel, Roberta Robinson's Café, and Eva's Lounge. The Hurricane, operated in the 1950s by Cleveland residents Willie (Bill) and Inez Dixon, later moved to a site further south on Chrisman and as of 2009 was still in business as the Club Hurricane 2001 under the ownership of J. W. Foster. Civil rights leader Amzie Moore, who lived at 614 S. Chrisman, owned Moore's Lounge on Highway 61, and in later years blues acts appeared elsewhere in town at the Airport Grocery, The Senator's Place, and Delta State University. Blind preacher and guitarist Leon Pinson also lived on Chrisman and often played for tips on the street.

CHURCH STREET

217 Church Street, Indianola, Mississippi

Church Street catered to every need of the African American community during the segregation era, when most area residents worked in the cotton fields during the week and came to town on weekends. Church Street (also designated as Church Avenue) offered everything from doctors' offices to tailoring shops, from shoe shine stands to ice cream parlors, from Saturday night blues to Sunday morning church services. B. B. King often played for tips on the street as a teenager in the 1940s.

Church Street was once a crowded, bustling thoroughfare where African Americans shopped, socialized, dined, listened to music, and attended church services. In the segregated 1950s, '60s, and earlier, according to Indianola attorney Carver Randle, "Church Street was an escape valve for black folks. On Saturdays Church Street had a festive kind of Mardi Gras atmosphere. People walked in the street and ate hot tamales and hot dogs and ice cream, drank corn whiskey and ate fish sandwiches. And although that was a tough time for black folks, we were pretty much self contained, all the way from fun to health care. If you made it to Church Street, you were all right."

When the young B.B. King played on Church Street, he found that churchgoers would give him praise and moral encouragement for performing gospel songs, but tippers were more likely to reward him with money when he played blues. Jones Night Spot on Church Street was then the area's premier blues venue, presenting bluesmen such as Robert Nighthawk and Robert Jr. Lockwood as well as the big bands of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Jones later moved to Hanna Street and was renamed the Club Ebony. King appeared there often after turning professional.

Other spots on Church Street, including Sports Place, Stella B.'s, the Pastime Inn, the Cotton Club, the Blue Chip, the Key Hole Inn, Price Night Club, George's Lounge, and Club Chicago, have offered blues music, most often on jukeboxes, although some have featured live entertainment. Guitarist David Lee Durham (1943 to 2008), who played with Bobby Whalen in the Ladies Choice Band, once had his own place on Church Street. Other local blues figures have included B.B. King's cousin Jerry Fair, his wife Galean Fair, and James Earl "Blue" Franklin, a former member of the Greenville band Roosevelt "Booba" Barnes and the Playboys. A Canadian television crew filmed the Barnes group performing at the Key Hole Inn in 1990.

While other notable blues musicians have been born in Indianola, few of them played on Church Street, since most left the area when they were young. These include Albert King (1923 to 1992), who rivaled B.B. as a blues guitar king; Chicago harmonica players Jazz Gillum (1904 to 1966, famed for his 1940 recording of "Key to the Highway") and Little Arthur Duncan (1934 to 2008); and brothers Louis (1932 to 1995) and Mac Collins (1929 to 1997), who were mainstays of the Detroit blues scene. Louis Collins, who performed under the name "Mr. Bo," and David Durham both developed styles heavily influenced by B.B. King. Another Indianola native, Earl Randle (born 1947), made his mark in Memphis as a songwriter.

CLUB DESIRE

Cross Street and Highway 1, Canton, Mississippi

The Club Desire, which stood across the street from this site, was one of Mississippi's premier blues and rhythm & blues nightclubs from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. Owner Clarence Chinn presented the top national acts, including B. B. King, Bobby Blue Bland, Little Junior Parker, James Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, Big Joe Turner, Hank Ballard & the Midnighters, and the Platters. In the '60s the club also served as an important meeting place for civil rights workers.

Club Desire – or New Club Desire, as it was actually named for most its tenure – was a Canton landmark for several decades, renowned for providing the African American community with first-class entertainment in a celebratory but elegant atmosphere, with strict codes enforced for dress and behavior. Its shows drew patrons from Memphis and New Orleans, and former Cantonites from Chicago and points beyond often attended family reunions and gala holiday events here. Founded by Clarence Chinn (1906 to 1995) in the 1940s as the Blue Garden, the club was rebuilt after a fire and renamed New Club Desire in the early '50s. The name Club Desire was first used by a popular nightspot on Desire Street in New Orleans.

The club also earned a place in blues recording history in January 1952 when Modern Records of California rented it to set up a portable tape machine to record several songs by legendary Canton singer-guitarist Elmore James (1918 to 1963). Modern's talent scout, Ike Turner from Clarksdale, played piano on the session. Two local members of James's band, Ernest "Frock" Odell and Precious "Little Hat" Whitehead, were probably also on the recordings. Most published accounts of this session have erroneously cited the name as the Club Bizarre.

Ironically, despite James's posthumous fame among blues fans, he and other local down-home bluesmen rarely played at New Club Desire, although they did perform for Clarence Chinn's brother C.O. (1919 to 1999) at his café on Franklin Street, as well as for Frank Williams at a big dance hall in the Sawmill Quarters. New Club Desire favored touring blues and soul bands with horn sections and professional talent revues. B.B. King, Bobby Bland, and Hank Ballard & the Midnighters were recalled as particular favorites, and the talent roster also featured Little Milton, Albert King, Ted Taylor, Memphis Slim, Joe Simon, and many more. Clarence Chinn sometimes coordinated bookings with Tom Wince, who owned the Blue Room, a prominent Vicksburg venue, so that acts could play in both towns while on tour.

After Chinn decided to focus his energy on real estate and housing, New Club Desire was operated by Leonard Garrett, George Raymond, and Eddie Newton. Raymond and C.O. Chinn were Canton's leading civil rights activists in the 1960s. At various times New Club Desire was used for private parties and meetings of civic, social, and civil rights organizations. The club closed in the 1970s.

CLUB EBONY

404 Hanna Street, Indianola, Mississippi

Club Ebony, one of the South's most important African American nightclubs, was built just after the end of World War II by Indianola entrepreneur Johnny Jones. Under Jones and successive owners, the club showcased Ray Charles, Count Basie, B. B. King, Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Albert King, Willie Clayton, and many other legendary acts. When owner Mary Shepard retired in 2008 after 34 years here, B. B. King purchased the venue to keep the vaunted Club Ebony tradition alive.

The club opened for business around 1948, but was built over a period of years by John Jones, who purchased this property in November of 1945 with his wife Josephine. In a 1948 memoir, Jones wrote: "It is said to be the South's largest and finest night club." The name Ebony was already a fashionable one for African American nightclubs; the first Club Ebony opened in Harlem in 1927. Jones had operated other clubs in Indianola, notably Jones Nite Spot on Church Street, where a young B. B. King peered through the slats to witness performances by Louis Jordan, Jay McShann, Pete Johnson, and Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller). Jones wrote that when he opened his first business, "there were no other clubs for Negroes in Indianola at that time." In a 1967 interview King recalled that Jones "was really the guy that kept the Negro neighborhood alive, by bringing people in, like Louis Jordan . . . Johnny Jones was a very nice fellow, and he knew the guys on the plantations didn't have any money during the week, but he would often let us in and we would pay him off when we came in Saturday."

Perhaps as a result of his generosity and the hefty fees he paid to present some of the biggest names in blues and jazz, Jones ran into financial difficulties with Club Ebony. After he died in May 1950, Jones's widow, his son, John E. Jones, Jr., and others operated the club under the ownership of James B. "Jimmy" Lee, a white bootlegger from Leland who had loaned money to Jones. Ruby Edwards, who also ran the popular Ruby's Nite Spot in Leland, took over the business in the mid-1950s, and purchased it in 1958. By then B. B. King had moved to Memphis and become a big name in the blues world; on a return to his home town to play at Club Ebony in 1955, he met Ruby's daughter Sue Carol Hall. They were married in 1958.

Club Ebony was rented in 1974 and then purchased in 1975 by Willie and Mary Shepard. The club's policy of booking top acts from the "chitlin circuit" continued throughout the decades: its talent roster included James Brown, Ike Turner, Syl Johnson, Clarence Carter, Denise LaSalle, Bobby Rush, Howlin' Wolf, Tyrone Davis, and many more. Mary Shepard also presented local blues by David Lee Durham, the Ladies Choice Band, and others. After B. B. King began returning for an annual homecoming festival in his honor in 1980, it became a tradition for him to climax the festivities with a nighttime performance at Club Ebony. When Shepard retired in 2008, King stepped in to buy Club Ebony, preserving not only a major cultural landmark but also the special place where, fifty years earlier, as he wrote in his autobiography, "I found love back down in the Delta."

COLUMBUS MISSISSIPPI BLUES

South 4th Street and Main, Columbus, Mississippi

The Black Prairies of eastern Mississippi have produced a number of notable blues musicians, including Howlin' Wolf, Bukka White, and Big Joe Williams. Activity in Columbus, the largest city in the region, centered around areas such as this block of 4th Street, called "Catfish Alley" after local fisherman brought their catches to town to be cooked and sold on the street. Bukka White sang of the good times to be had in town in his 1969 recording "Columbus, Mississippi Blues."

The blues heritage of Columbus and Lowndes County has drawn on a variety of sources, both homegrown and imported, dating back to the heydays of cotton plantations and traveling minstrel shows. The first Columbus musician to record, in 1929, was bluesman Ben Curry, a.k.a. Blind Ben Covington, who worked the minstrel show circuit as a contortionist in addition to displaying his skills on harmonica and banjo. Since he only pretended to be blind, he also had another name: Bogus Ben Covington. The county's most prominent blues singer was Big Joe Williams of Crawford. Williams (1903 to 1982) recorded prolifically and toured several continents, but would still come to Columbus to play in Catfish Alley in his later years. Among other early blues guitarists based in Lowndes County were Otto Virgial, Robert Blewett, Tom Turner, and, at times, Bukka White.

Columbus was also a stop for touring acts such as B.B. King, Bobby Bland, Little Richard, Louis Jordan, Louis Armstrong, and James Brown, who all stayed at the Queen City Hotel (for many years the only hotel that catered to African Americans). Blues was featured at venues along Seventh Avenue North and in other neighborhoods including Frog Bottom and Sandfield. Entertainment spots included the Hut, Richardson's Café, the Tic Toc, the Blue Room, the Night Owl, and the Blue Goose. Bluesmen also played in the cafes and pool halls, or on the street, in Catfish Alley, a center of black business and social life. Live gospel broadcasts also once emanated from WACR radio in "the alley." In later years, music spread to other venues such as the Elbow Room, Down at Joe's, and the Crossroads, featuring area blues and R&B performers including Margie & Keith, Jake Moore, Big Joe Shelton & the Black Prairie Blues Kings, Brown Sugar, and the Flames. Blues also became a feature of the annual Seventh Avenue Heritage Festival, which began in the 1980s.

Another tradition with Columbus roots, Decoration Day (now known as Memorial Day), began with the placement of flowers on the graves of Civil War soldiers. Decoration Day was also practiced in the African American community in remembrance of departed loved ones, inspiring songs by several blues singers. Big Joe Williams played guitar on the best-known version, "Decoration Blues" by John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. Sonny Boy also recorded "Decoration Day Blues No. 2," and Howlin' Wolf, Bukka White, and Big Joe Williams were among those who later recorded their own versions.

CORNER OF 10 AND 61

North Main Street and 2nd Street, Leland, Mississippi

A major source of income for blues artists in the first half of the 20th century was tips. This corner, formerly the intersection of highways 10 and 61, was a profitable spot, particularly on Saturdays when people from the country came to town. Passengers on the “Planter,” a train that ran daily from New Orleans to Memphis, also stopped here to eat dinner and be entertained by Delta musicians.

Today Highway 61 is widely known as the “blues highway,” but early on Highway 10 was of equal importance to itinerant musicians. It crossed Greenville’s blues center and loosely followed the Southern Railway line through Leland, Dunleith, Holly Ridge, Indianola, Moorhead, Berclair, Itta Bena, Greenwood and on to points east. Highway 10’s importance declined somewhat with the completion of the considerably straighter Highway 82 in 1936.

Street corners were an important venue for blues artists in the Delta, particularly on Saturday afternoons when people from the country came to town to shop. Highways 61 and 10 met at this corner, making it a bustling center of commerce. Musicians played requests in exchange for tips, and street vendors sold hot tamales and fried fish to the gathered crowds. In the early 1900s Leland earned the nickname “the hellhole of the Delta” because of its many drinking and gambling establishments, which often featured blues. Even after Leland “cleaned up” it remained a hotbed for the blues, and this corner featured musicians regularly until the 1960s.

Early Delta blues performers who played here include master guitarist Eugene Powell (1908 to 1998), who recorded for Bluebird Records in 1936 under the name “Sonny Boy Nelson,” and guitarist Charlie Booker (1919 to 1989), a native of Sunflower County who lived in Leland during WWII. Late in his career, Nelson was an early influence on younger artists such as Keb’ Mo’.

In January 1952, Booker recorded four songs for Los Angeles-based Modern Records at a session in Greenville that featured harmonica player Houston Boines, drummer “Cleanhead” Love, and pianist Ike Turner, who was also serving as producer. One of the songs was “No Ridin’ Blues,” released on Modern subsidiary label Blues & Rhythm, a dark-themed song that suggested the influence of Charley Patton and referred to historic fires in Greenville and Leland. Booker’s record took on new meaning when, a month following its release, an entire block of Leland burned down. The song brought regional fame to Booker, who relocated to South Bend, Indiana, the following year.

COTTON PICKIN' BLUES

Hopson Planting Company, Highway 49, Clarksdale, Mississippi

One of the major factors behind the “great migration” of African Americans from the South to northern cities was the mechanization of agriculture, which diminished the need for manual laborers. In 1944 the Hopson Planting Company produced the first crop of cotton to be entirely planted, harvested, and baled by machine. Blues pianist Joe Willie “Pinetop” Perkins was a tractor driver here at the time. He later played in the band of Muddy Waters and enjoyed a successful solo career.

Cotton and the blues are intimately connected, and one popular explanation for the predominance of blues in the Delta is the great concentration of African Americans whose labor was required for the cultivation of cotton here. Fieldhands who could play guitar or piano provided entertainment for other workers, and sometimes pursued music as a profession to get out of the backbreaking work in the fields. Blues performers have recalled making more money playing on Saturday nights than laborers would earn in a whole week.

Here at Hopson in the 1940s pianist Joe Willie “Pinetop” Perkins managed to keep a foot in both worlds, working as a tractor driver and as a professional entertainer. While living in the Delta Perkins worked in local juke joints with artists including Lee Kizart and Robert Nighthawk, and performed on the radio show King Biscuit Time with Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller) on KFFA in Helena, Arkansas. The live program was broadcast weekdays at 12:15 p.m. when agricultural workers were at home eating lunch. Perkins, who remembered John Lee Hooker sometimes playing here at Hopson, later taught Ike Turner to play piano.

According to military records Perkins was inducted into the Army in June of 1943, but he recalled that the plantation owners were able to remove him from a bus of draftees, as tractor drivers were deemed essential to the war effort. Other bluesmen who served as tractor drivers during World War II included B.B. King, Son House, and Muddy Waters. As a tractor driver, Perkins played an important role in the mechanization of cotton production, as the Hopson Planting Company was at the forefront of this transformation. From the '20s through '40s engineers from the International Harvester Company tested and developed tractor-mounted cotton pickers at Hopson. In 1944 they succeeded in harvesting a crop using only machines, and the technology was soon implemented across the South, resulting in changes including the replacement of the sharecropping system with wage labor and the destruction of the abandoned homes of displaced workers.

Perkins left the Delta in the late '40s, and worked for many years in bands with Earl Hooker, Muddy Waters, and others. He began returning to the Delta to perform after appearing at the first King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena in 1986. He became a regular at the annual Helena festival as well as at Hopson, where an annual celebration was inaugurated in his honor in 2001. Perkins was also honored with a Mississippi Blues Trail marker in his hometown of Belzoni in 2008.

DENISE LASALLE

102 Castleman, Belzoni, Mississippi

Soul and blues star Denise LaSalle was born Denise Allen near Sidon in rural Leflore County on July 16, 1939, but spent much of her childhood here in Belzoni. After moving to Chicago in her teens, she began writing songs and scored the first of many self-penned hits in 1971 with the No. 1 R&B single "Trapped By a Thing Called Love." LaSalle's direct and often provocative style on stage also led to great success as a live performer.

LaSalle achieved success not only as a recording artist and performer but also as a songwriter, producer, record label owner, and nightclub operator. Ora Denise Allen spent her early years on a plantation and around age seven or eight moved with her family moved to Belzoni, where they lived in homes on Cain and Hayden streets. In the late 1940s she saw bluesmen Elmore James and Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 performing on radio programs broadcast from the Easy Pay furniture store downtown. She sang in church as a child and after moving to Chicago in her mid-teens worked with the gospel group The Sacred Five.

At fifteen Allen sold stories to the magazines Tan and True Confessions. Soon thereafter she began writing songs and changed her professional name to "LaSalle" because it "sounded French." In 1967 LaSalle made her first recordings for bluesman Billy "The Kid" Emerson's Tarpon label, scoring a minor hit with "A Love Reputation." In 1969 LaSalle and her then-husband Bill Jones formed Crajon Productions. The LaSalle-penned "Get Your Lie Straight" was a major hit for Bill Coday on the Crajon label. In 1971-72 LaSalle gained national recognition with three Top Ten R&B singles on Westbound Records: "Trapped By a Thing Called Love," "Now Run and Tell That," and "Man Sized Job." As further records on Westbound, ABC, and MCA continued to hit the charts, LaSalle was becoming infamous for her racy onstage persona and extended, off-color "raps" on how women should please their men and vice versa. LaSalle attributed her strong abilities as a storyteller to her lifelong love of country music; her song "Married, But Not to Each Other" was covered by country star Barbara Mandrell.

In 1984 LaSalle recorded the first of her eleven albums for the Jackson-based Malaco Records. Nine of these sold well enough to make the national charts, as did the Malaco single "My Tu-Tu." During her Malaco years LaSalle began to be marketed as a "blues" rather than "R&B" artist and in 1986 she founded the National Association for the Preservation of the Blues to bring more attention to the "soul/blues" style. LaSalle also wrote songs for Z. Z. Hill, who had a hit with her "Someone Else Is Steppin' In," as well as for Ann Peebles and Little Milton, whose recording of the LaSalle-Mack Rice composition "Packed Up and Took My Man" was sampled by rapper Ghostface Killah. In 1997 LaSalle left Malaco after her husband, businessman and disc jockey James "Super" Wolfe, Jr., joined the ministry. She recorded a gospel album on her own Angel In the Midst label, but soon returned to the blues field with popular albums on her own Ordena and Ecko Records. In 2008 she rejoined the Malaco Records roster.

DOCUMENTING THE BLUES

Sorority Row and Grove Loop, University of Mississippi, Oxford

The University of Mississippi is internationally famous for its work in documenting African American blues culture. Since 1983 the Center for the Study of Southern Culture has published *Living Blues* magazine, which it purchased from the magazine's founders in Chicago. The Living Blues and B.B. King collections of records and memorabilia were among the first major components of the Blues Archive, established by the university in 1984 and housed in the J.D. Williams Library.

Living Blues, the first American magazine dedicated exclusively to the blues, was founded in 1970 by seven young enthusiasts in Chicago. Cofounders Amy van Singel and Jim O'Neal became owners and publishers of the magazine in 1971, operating it until its transfer to the University of Mississippi in 1983. Cofounder Bruce Iglauer formed Alligator Records, which became the most prominent independent blues label, while cofounder Paul Garon authored several books, including *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* and biographies of blues artists Memphis Minnie and Peetie Wheatstraw. *Living Blues* soon became a journal of record for the African-American blues tradition, specializing in lengthy, first person narratives of living blues artists and chronicling local blues activity around the country, including Mississippi. The magazine entered its 40th year of publication in 2009.

The Center for the Study of the Southern Culture, established at the University in 1978, acquired *Living Blues* in 1983. The Center's director at the time was Dr. William R. Ferris, a Vicksburg native who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Delta blues traditions and was a contributor to *Living Blues*. O'Neal, who lived in Biloxi and Oxford as a child, and van Singel moved from Chicago to Oxford after the transfer of the magazine. In 1980 they had cofounded the Rooster Blues record label, and O'Neal later started the Stackhouse label and helped establish the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival in Clarksdale. The Center launched its own Southern Culture label in 1983 to document Mississippi blues, gospel, and folk music. *Living Blues* was later edited by Peter Lee, who was a founder of the Oxford-based Fat Possum record label, David Nelson, Scott Barretta, and Brett J. Bonner. Ferris, Nelson, and Barretta also served as hosts of the university-produced radio show "Highway 61," which began its long tenure on Mississippi Public Broadcasting in 1984.

Ferris was also instrumental in the establishment in 1983 of the University's Blues Archive and arranged for his friend B. B. King to contribute his large record collection to the Archive, which is housed at the J. D. Williams Library. Other major components of the Archive are the *Living Blues* Collection of recordings, photos, and subject files, which was donated by van Singel and O'Neal, the Trumpet Records Collection, and the Sheldon Harris Collection. The Archive has aided thousands of researchers and has been headed by archivists Suzanne Flandreau, Edward Komara and Greg Johnson. The University has also offered courses on blues topics taught by Ferris, Peter Aschoff, Adam Gussow, David Evans and others, and in 2003 began hosting "Blues Today: A Living Blues Symposium."

DOROTHY MOORE AND THE ALAMO THEATRE

333 North Farish Street, Jackson, Mississippi

The Alamo Theatre opened at this location in 1949. Prior to that the Alamo occupied two other spots in the area. The theatre showed movies, hosted music competitions, and presented blues and jazz concerts by artists such as Nat “King” Cole, Elmore James, Louis Jordan, and Cab Calloway during the 1940s and ‘50s. Gospel groups and vocal ensembles also performed. Local resident Dorothy Moore’s many victories at Alamo talent contests ultimately led to a successful recording career.

Talent shows have long served as an entry to the world of professional entertainment, and in Jackson many aspiring artists began their careers in contests at the Alamo Theatre. One was Dorothy Moore, who was offered a recording contract after consistently winning the Wednesday night talent contests here while in junior high. In 1966 she recorded an album as the lead singer of the vocal group the Poppies. Moore later sang background vocals for Malaco Records in Jackson and was soon recording there as a featured artist. In 1976 her record “Misty Blue” was a huge hit and established Malaco as a major player in the soul and blues field. Her other hits included “Funny How Time Slips Away,” “I Believe You,” and “With Pen In Hand.” She later formed her own label, Farish Street Records, and her honors include a 1996 Governor’s Award For Excellence in the Arts.

For many decades the Alamo served as a major African American entertainment venue under the management of Arthur Lehmann. The theatre opened at 134 North Farish Street in 1915 and moved to 123 West Amite Street, just off Farish, in the 1920s. In 1948 Lehmann constructed a new building at this location to house the Alamo. Lehmann sold the property in 1957. The Alamo served mostly as a movie theatre, initially showing piano-accompanied silent movies and, after 1932, “soundies.” The theatre also booked vaudeville, jazz, blues, and gospel performers, including Elmore James, Tiny Bradshaw, Nat King Cole, and the Rays of Rhythm from Mississippi’s Piney Woods School. Al Benson, who later became Chicago’s top radio personality, promoted shows here in the 1930s and sang with the Leaners Band, which featured George Leaner on piano. Lillian McMurry of Trumpet Records, whose offices were located on the same block, attended gospel shows here to discover talent. Blues pianist Otis Spann recalled winning an Alamo talent contest as a child, and other local artists who competed included Sam Baker, Jr., Mel Brown, Sam Myers, Cadillac George Harris, Little Jeno Tucker, Tommy Tate, Amanda Humphrey (Bradley), Roosevelt Robinson, the vocal group the Quails (Dequincy Johnson, George Jackson, and Sam Jones), and Albert Goodman, later of the Moments and the trio Ray, Goodman & Brown. During the 1950s and ‘60s Jobie Martin of Jackson’s WOKJ radio emceed the contests.

The Alamo closed in the 1980s and, following extensive renovation, reopened under non-profit ownership in 1997. The theatre began to celebrate Farish Street’s musical legacy again with occasional music programs, and in 2000 Jackson bluesman Eddie Cotton, Jr., recorded his CD *Live at the Alamo Theatre* here.

EALEY BROTHERS

111 South Broadway, Natchez, Mississippi

The Ealey family of Sibley has produced some of the most talented musicians to emerge from the Natchez area. Brothers Theodis, YZ, and Melwyn Ealey performed together locally in the band YZ Ealey and the Merry Makers in the early 1960s. They later became recording artists, as did their older brother, David ("Bubba") Ealey. Theodis developed a captivating blend of traditional blues and modern funk and soul music to achieve national prominence after leaving Mississippi.

Theodis Ealey gained national recognition in 2004 when his song "Stand Up In It" became a radio hit and reached No. 1 on Billboard's R&B/Hip-Hop Singles Sales chart. Although the song introduced Ealey (b. 1947) to many blues fans, he had at the time already played music professionally for over forty years. Born at the family farm in Sibley, fifteen miles south of Natchez, Theodis began playing bass at thirteen with YZ and the Merry Makers, which included his older brothers YZ (b. 1937) on guitar and Melwin (also spelled Melwyn) (1942-2005), on vocals and drums. YZ was mentored by his older brother David ("Bubba") (b. 1927), who began playing guitar locally in his teens and soon moved to New Orleans, where he played at house parties in a style similar to Lightnin' Hopkins and Little Son Jackson together with a young Guitar Slim. He lived for many years in Oakland and later retired to Port Hudson, Louisiana, all the time continuing to perform informally.

YZ received his first guitar from Bubba and began performing at local juke joints with Melwin as a teenager. After a stint in the Navy, YZ settled in Oakland, where he performed with L. C. "Good Rockin'" Robinson, Big Mama Thornton, and others. After several years he returned to Natchez, where he formed the Merry Makers with his younger brothers and local musicians including Tobe Smith, Jonathan Grennell, and A. J. Reed. For several years they served as the house band at Haney's Big House in nearby Ferriday, the most important club in the region from the late '40s until mid-'60s. YZ continued to work locally for decades, later employing the band of Harvey Knox, born in Tallulah, and vocalist Al Watson, a native of Vidalia.

In 1963 Melwin moved to Oakland, where he performed as a vocalist at local venues for decades, singing rhythm and blues, country, and ballads. In Natchez Theodis worked locally as a guitarist with Eugene Butler and the Rocking Royals, whose members included Zollie Polk, later active as a harmonica player in the Los Angeles area. In the mid-'60s Theodis joined the military, forming his first band while stationed in Hawaii. In 1970 he moved to Oakland and cut his first singles in the mid-'70s. He formed the IFGAM label in 1981, recording singles by both himself and Melwin. In the early '90s Theodis relocated to the Atlanta area, recorded four albums for the Ichiban label, and began touring abroad. He later reactivated IFGAM, releasing several albums including Stand Up In It and CDs by Bubba (Simply Paw Paw), YZ (Ground Zero), and other artists. IFGAM is an acronym for "I Feel Good About Myself."

EDDIE SHAW

Highways 1 and 448, Benoit, Mississippi

Blues saxophonist extraordinaire Eddie Shaw was born on a Stringtown plantation on March 20, 1937. He learned music at school in Greenville and performed in various local bands before moving to Chicago to join the Muddy Waters band. Shaw served as band-leader for Howlin' Wolf for several years and launched his own busy touring career after Wolf's death in 1976. His hard-hitting horn work won him Instrumentalist of the Year honors in the 2006 and 2007 Blues Music Award.

Eddie Shaw earned international acclaim as one of the few saxophonists to ever build an enduring career leading a blues band. The most well-known saxophonists have often been jazz musicians, and wild, honking sax players once ruled on the early post-World War II rhythm & blues scene, but in most blues and R&B bands, sax players have been sidemen. Neither is the saxophone commonly associated with the music of the Mississippi Delta; in fact, in blues jargon, the term "Mississippi saxophone" jokingly refers to harmonica (which Shaw learned to play as well). But many of the most prominent bluesmen to emerge from the Delta have employed either a saxophonist or an entire horn section in their bands, including B. B. King, Elmore James, Howlin' Wolf, Little Milton, Ike Turner, and, on many occasions, Muddy Waters.

Horn players in Mississippi tended to develop in larger towns, where there were organized music programs in school or after school, such as Greenville, Clarksdale, Jackson, Natchez, and Vicksburg. Shaw, who moved to Greenville after living in Stringtown and Rosedale, was one of many who learned under the tutelage of Greenville postman Winchester "Little Wynn" Davis, who also hired many of his pupils to play in his band at dances. Shaw first played trombone and clarinet in the Coleman High School band and began playing sax at dances and clubs with the Green Tops, a local band modeled after Vicksburg's famous Red Tops, and with Charlie Booker, Elmore James, Little Milton, Ike Turner, and others, often joined by his friend and fellow saxophonist Oliver Sain. While attending Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State University) in Itta Bena, Shaw sat in with Muddy Waters in 1957. At Muddy's invitation, Shaw soon headed for Chicago, and after some return trips to Greenville, he finally settled in Chicago, where he worked with Muddy, Howlin' Wolf, Magic Sam, Otis Rush, Freddie King, and others as a sideman when not leading groups of his own. He also operated various businesses, including a barbecue house, laundromat, and nightclubs on the West Side. The Wolf Gang, the band he put together for Howlin' Wolf in the early 1970s, continued to work with Shaw after Wolf's death.

Shaw, a prolific songwriter, recorded his first single in 1966 and numerous albums thereafter, in addition to accompanying Wolf, Magic Sam, and others on recording sessions. The titles of his first three albums, "Have Blues, Will Travel"; "Movin' and Groovin' Man"; and "King of the Road", exemplified his tireless travels, which eventually took him to all fifty states and several foreign countries and earned him a widespread following and regular recognition in the annual Blues Music Awards. He made his film debut in the 2007 movie "Honeydripper."

EDDIE TAYLOR

Highways 1 and 448, Shaw, Mississippi

Benoit native Eddie Taylor, an architect of the post-World War 2 Chicago blues genre, was renowned for his work both as a bandleader and accompanist. He was best known for shaping the distinctive sound of Jimmy Reed, a childhood friend with whom Taylor reunited in Chicago. The Benoit area was also the birthplace of James DeShay, a mainstay of the St. Louis blues scene; James "Peck" Curtis, famed for his work on "King Biscuit Time" radio; and southern soul star Nathaniel Kimble.

Eddie Taylor (January 29, 1923 to December 25, 1985) is revered as one of the most influential guitarists in Chicago blues history, known for his versatility, impeccable timing, and consummate musicianship. As a child Taylor was influenced by Delta bluesmen Charley Patton, Son House, Big Joe Williams, and Robert Johnson, but learned to play guitar from a musician named "Popcorn." Taylor performed in local juke joints around Leland and Clarksdale and taught guitar to Jimmy Reed in nearby Meltonia. In the 1940s he moved to Memphis and then to Chicago, where he helped pioneer the city's new electric blues style.

During the 1950s and '60s Taylor and Reed collaborated over dozens of sessions to create many of Reed's hits for Vee-Jay Records, including "You Don't Have to Go," "Baby What You Want Me to Do," "Honest I Do," and "Ain't That Lovin' You Baby." Taylor also recorded "Bad Boy," "Bigtown Playboy," and other singles for Vee-Jay as a solo artist, followed by albums for a number of different companies. Always in demand for studio sessions and nightclub dates, Taylor recorded and performed with John Lee Hooker, Elmore James and his Broomdusters, Carey Bell, Sunnyland Slim, Homesick James, Big Walter Horton, Johnny Littlejohn, Snooky Pryor, Floyd Jones, and the Aces, among many others. He began to tour internationally in the late '60s and remained active in music until his death. Although never as well known to the public as many of his comrades in the blues, Taylor was rated so highly by critics, historians, and musicians that he was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 1987.

Taylor's wife was blues vocalist Vera Taylor (1943 to 1999), a native of Dublin, Mississippi, and the niece of bluesmen Eddie, Jimmy, and Willie Burns. She often appeared on stage with her husband. Their children, Eddie, Jr., Larry, Milton, Tim, Demetria, Brenda, and Edna, all became singers or musicians, and Vera, Eddie, Jr., and Larry Taylor also recorded CDs of their own.

Benoit has been home to several other performers of note, including Nathaniel Kimble, James "Peck" Curtis, James DeShay, and Jessie Clay. Music from Benoit was also featured in the 1956 movie *Baby Doll*, which was filmed at the antebellum Burrus house and other local sites. In the film, a harmonica player sings the blues classic "Baby Please Don't Go" and a woman at a cafe sings the traditional spiritual "I Shall Not Be Moved." The cast credits in the film acknowledged the singers and most of the other local extras simply as "Some People of Benoit, Mississippi."

EDWARDS HOTEL

235 West Capitol, Jackson, Mississippi

Constructed in 1923 and renamed the King Edward Hotel in 1954, the Edwards Hotel was the site of temporary studios set up by Okeh Records in 1930 and the American Record Corporation in 1935 to record blues artists Bo Carter, Robert Wilkins, Joe McCoy, Isaiah Nettles, the Mississippi Sheiks, and others. The Mississippi Sheiks also performed at the hotel, and Houston Stackhouse recalled that he played here together with fellow bluesman Robert Nighthawk and country music pioneer Jimmie Rodgers.

The Edwards Hotel, housed in a luxurious, twelve-story Beaux Arts style building, would appear at first glance to be an odd place to make blues recordings. The first hotel on the site, the Confederate House, was built in 1861, and after its destruction by General Sherman's forces in 1863 it was rebuilt in 1867 as the three-story Edwards House. The Edwards Hotel was constructed in 1923, and soon became a favorite lodging and deal-making place for state legislators. Its role as a recording studio stemmed from the fact that prior to World War II all major recording companies were located in the North, and Southern-based artists often had to travel hundreds of miles to record. An occasional solution was setting up temporary facilities at hotels, and in Jackson the Okeh and ARC companies turned to H. C. Speir, a talent scout who operated Speir Phonograph Company on nearby North Farish Street.

Speir had previously discovered blues artists Charley Patton and Tommy Johnson and sent them to other cities to record. Together with Polk Brockman of Okeh, Speir arranged the first sessions in Mississippi in December of 1930 at the Edwards Hotel. Blues performers at the sessions included the Mississippi Sheiks, an African American string band from the Bolton/Edwards area, who had recorded the massive hit "Sitting On Top of the World" for Okeh earlier in 1930. Individual members of the Sheiks' rotating cast also recorded at the hotel, including the duo of guitarists Bo Carter (Chatmon) and Walter Jacobs (Vinson), and mandolinist Charlie McCoy, a native of Raymond. Other artists included Caldwell Bracey and his wife Virginia from Bolton, who recorded both gospel and blues (as "Mississippi" Bracy [sic]), the gospel duo of "Slim" Duckett and "Pig" Norwood, and Elder Charlie Beck and Elder Curry, who both recorded sermons. The sessions were also notable for capturing white Mississippi string bands, the Newton County Hill Billies and Freeny's Barn Dance Band (from Leake County) as well as Tennessee-based country music pioneer Uncle Dave Macon.

In 1935 Speir set up a second series of sessions at the Edwards Hotel for ARC, which operated Vocalion and several other labels. The most prominent artist was Memphis bluesman Robert Wilkins, a native of Hernando who recorded as "Tim Wilkins." Also recorded were pianist Harry Chatmon, brother of Bo Carter, and obscure and colorfully named artists Sarah and Her Milk Bull, the Delta Twins, Kid Stormy Weather, Blind Mack, and the Mississippi Moaner, aka Isaiah Nettles, a Copiah County native whose sole single, "Mississippi Moan/It's Cold In China," is widely regarded as a classic of early Mississippi blues.

ELDER ROMA WILSON AND THE REVEREND LEON PINSON

Watson and Bankhead Streets, New Albany, Mississippi

The down-home gospel sounds of renowned Union County musicians Elder Roma Wilson (born 1910) and Rev. Leon Pinson (1919 to 1998) won them many admirers among blues and folk music audiences, although they were evangelists rather than blues artists. Partners early in their careers, they performed at a number of festivals after reuniting in 1989. Wilson, who formed one of the first African-American gospel harmonica quartets in the 1940s, was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship in 1994.

Elder Roma Wilson and the Reverend Leon Pinson performed music that accentuated both the similarities and the differences between gospel and the blues. Instrumentally, the music often sounded so much like blues that it was sometimes called “holy blues” or “gospel blues.” But the lyrics of their songs were sacred, not secular, and both Wilson and Pinson steadfastly adhered to their religion and claimed that they never played the blues. Wilson told author Alan Young, “I don’t have the blues. I only have joy. Got no blues, but we got respect for them – if people want to play ‘em, that’s their business.” Pinson said, “I hear some people say I’m singing the ‘gospel blues.’ Gospel blues! Ain’t no blues in gospel . . . You don’t have no need of the blues if you’re saved.”

While churchgoers have often been at odds with the blues community, some of Mississippi’s most renowned African American artists recorded and performed both blues and gospel music, including Charley Patton, Son House, B. B. King, Memphis Minnie, Bukka White, Big Joe Williams, Blind Roosevelt Graves, and Mississippi Fred McDowell. Clarksdale native Sam Cooke helped revolutionize popular music when he “crossed over” and adapted his gospel style to rhythm & blues.

Roma Wilson, born December 22, 1910, near Hickory Flat in Benton County, began playing harmonica in his teens and was ordained by the age of eighteen. He grew up around New Albany, farmed and worked at a sawmill and on the railroad, and moved to Arkansas and then to Michigan, where he found a job at a foundry, all while continuing to preach and play gospel music. He taught his three sons to play harmonica, and together they performed in church and on the streets of Detroit. Their unique harmonica quartet sound was featured on a 1952 recording credited to “Elder R. Wilson and Family ” which later piqued considerable interest among blues and gospel collectors. In 1976 Wilson returned to the New Albany area, although he eventually moved back to Detroit.

Guitarist and pianist Leon Pinson was born in Union County on January 11, 1919. A case of meningitis left him partially crippled and almost blind, but his musical talent enabled him to sustain a career playing at churches, concerts, and on street corners. He performed with Wilson in Mississippi and Arkansas, and was also a member of groups including the Silvertone Quartet in New Albany and the Delta Melodies in Cleveland, Mississippi, his home for most of the years between 1964 and 1988. While in the Delta, Pinson, who also trained and played for gospel choirs across North Mississippi, came to the attention of folklorists, and he was already known on the folk and blues circuit by the time he re-joined Wilson. For several years they traveled around the country to great acclaim. Pinson died on October 10, 1998.

ELKS HART LODGE NUMBER 640
106 East Scott Street, Greenwood, Mississippi

During the 1940s, '50s and '60s, the Elks Hart Lodge No. 640 at this site was one of the most important venues for rhythm and blues in the Delta. Particularly during the segregation era, fraternal organizations such as the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World (the "black Elks") were central to African American political, cultural, and social life, and played an important role in the Civil Rights movement.

The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World (IBPOEW) was formed in 1898 in Cincinnati, Ohio, by African Americans who were systematically excluded from joining the "white" Elks organization, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE). By 1899 twelve lodges of the IBPOEW, which became commonly known as the "black Elks," were established in eight states, including Mississippi, and in 1902 a female auxiliary group, the Daughters of the IBPOEW was founded. African American railway workers, notably Pullman Porters, were instrumental in the formation of new chapters of the black Elks, particularly in the South. State presidents of the Mississippi Elks have included Greenwood chapter members Edward V. Cochran, W. J. Bishop, and Bertrand Antoine, all Past Grand Exalted Rulers.

During the segregation era, when most hotels, auditoriums, and halls were off limits to African Americans, the lodges of the black Elks provided important spaces for social, political, and economic gatherings. Other fraternal organizations that played a similar role included African American chapters of the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, and Shriners. The black Elks were organized around principles of "Charity, Justice, Brotherly and Sisterly Love and Fidelity," and were deeply involved in fighting for and educating its members about economic and civil rights. In 1927 the IBPOEW formed a Civil Rights Commission whose work helped establish a legal framework for later protests during the civil rights era. Here in Greenwood, local civil rights activist and Elk member Cleveland Jordan arranged for the Elks hall to be the first meeting place for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) upon their arrival in Greenwood in 1962. Part of SNCC's voter registration campaign involved the teaching of "freedom songs," which usually drew from religious traditions but were sometimes based on rhythm & blues hits.

The IBPOEW was the largest of the black fraternal organizations, and along with chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, played an important role in providing venues for touring blues and R&B artists. Members were encouraged to sell tickets to ensure high turnouts. From the 1940s through the '90s artists performing at the Greenwood lodge included B. B. King, T-Bone Walker, Ike and Tina Turner, James Brown, Percy Mayfield, "Little" Junior Parker, Roy Brown, Ruth Brown, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Lightnin' Hopkins, Big Mama Thornton, Memphis Slim, Fats Domino, Lloyd Price, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Little Milton, the Drifters, Clyde McPhatter, Johnny Ace, the Five Royales, Solomon Burke, Brook Benton, Ivory Joe Hunter, Smiley Lewis, Etta James, Charles Brown, Ernie K-Doe, Bobby Rush, Lee "Shot" Williams, and Chick Willis.

ELVIS AND THE BLUES

306 Elvis Presley Drive, Tupelo, Mississippi

Elvis Presley revolutionized popular music by blending the blues he first heard as a youth in Tupelo with country, pop, and gospel. Many of the first songs Elvis recorded for the Sun label in Memphis were covers of earlier blues recordings by African Americans, and he continued to incorporate blues into his records and live performances for the remainder of his career.

Elvis first encountered the blues here in Tupelo, and it remained central to his music throughout his career. The Presley family lived in several homes in Tupelo that were adjacent to African American neighborhoods, and as a youngster Elvis and his friends often heard the sounds of blues and gospel streaming out of churches, clubs, and other venues. According to Mississippi blues legend Big Joe Williams, Elvis listened in particular to Tupelo blues guitarist Lonnie Williams.

During Elvis's teen years in Memphis he could hear blues on Beale Street, just a mile south of his family's home. Producer Sam Phillips had captured many of the city's new, electrified blues sounds at his Memphis Recording Service studio, where Elvis began his recording career with Phillips's Sun label. Elvis was initially interested in recording ballads, but Phillips was more excited by the sound created by Presley and studio musicians Scotty Moore and Bill Black on July 5, 1954, when he heard them playing bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's 1946 recording "That's All Right."

That song appeared on Presley's first single, and each of his other four singles for Sun Records also included a cover of a blues song—Arthur Gunter's "Baby Let's Play House," Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," Little Junior Parker's "Mystery Train," and Kokomo Arnold's "Milk Cow Blues," recorded under the title "Milkcow Blues Boogie" by Elvis, who likely learned it from a version by western swing musician Johnnie Lee Wills. Elvis's sound inspired countless other artists, including Tupelo rockabilly musician Jumpin' Gene Simmons, whose 1964 hit "Haunted House" was first recorded by bluesman Johnny Fuller.

Elvis continued recording blues after his move to RCA Records in 1955, including "Hound Dog," first recorded by Big Mama Thornton in 1952, Lowell Fulson's "Reconsider Baby," Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll," and two more by Crudup, "My Baby Left Me" and "So Glad You're Mine." One of Elvis's most important sources of material was the African American songwriter Otis Blackwell, who wrote the hits "All Shook Up," "Don't Be Cruel," and "Return to Sender."

In Presley's so-called "comeback" appearance on NBC television in 1968, he reunited with Scotty Moore and Bill Black to revisit his early blues roots. The trio reprised their early Sun recordings, and also performed other blues, including the Jimmy Reed songs "Big Boss Man" and "Baby What You Want Me to Do." Blues remained a feature of Elvis's live performances until his death in 1977.

FREEDOM VILLAGE

Sligo Dairy Road and Freedom Village Road, Greenville, Mississippi

The first Mississippi Delta Blues Festival was held on October 21, 1978, here at Freedom Village, a rural community founded as a refuge for displaced agricultural workers. In 1987 the festival, organized by Greenville-based M.A.C.E. (Mississippi Action for Community Education), moved to a location closer to Greenville.

When the Mississippi Delta Blues Festival was founded in 1978, the concept of a blues festival was still a relative novelty, but by 2000 there were hundreds of such annual events held around the world. Although various folk and jazz events had included blues on their schedules as early as the 1930s, festivals focusing exclusively on blues (or blues and gospel) only took off with the blues revival of the 1960s; the first to gain national recognition was the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. The San Francisco Blues Festival and the John Henry Blues and Gospel Jubilee in West Virginia, the only continuous blues gatherings with greater life spans than the Delta Blues Festival at the time this marker was dedicated in 2008, both began in 1973.

The Mississippi Delta Blues Festival is unique in that its origins were in the Civil Rights movement. After two elderly African Americans were found frozen to death in their shack, activists formed the Poor People's Conference and occupied an abandoned building on the Greenville Air Force Base to draw attention to local social conditions. They sought to create a self-sustaining community, and in 1966 a group of African American families moved to a 400-acre site here. Initially called "Freedom City," the site was incorporated as "Freedom Village" in 1970.

The festival was offshoot of the Delta Arts Project initiated by M.A.C.E. (Mississippi Action for Community Education), which was founded in 1967. The brainchild of members Charles Bannerman and Kay Morgan, the festival was intended, in Bannerman's words, to "honor an art form that was born in the Mississippi Delta cottonfields and was birthed by workers and a way of life whose hardships we must never forget."

The initial event was staged on a flatbed trailer for a crowd of about 3,500, and featured mostly traditional artists including Big Joe Williams, Furry Lewis, James "Son" Thomas, Sam Chatmon, R.L. Burnside, Eugene Powell, Jack Owens, Bud Spires, and Joe Willie Wilkins. Emcees were musician Bobby Ray Watson and folklorists Worth Long and Alan Lomax. Under the direction of Malcolm Walls and others, the festival soon drew tens of thousands of visitors from around the world. It expanded to include electric blues pioneers Willie Dixon, John Lee Hooker, and Muddy Waters, blues rockers Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan, and soul-blues stars such as Bobby "Blue" Bland, Little Milton, Johnnie Taylor, Tyrone Davis, Bobby Rush, and Lynn White. The festival also provided a platform for many Greenville area artists.

GATEMOUTH MOORE

801 Jerry Clower Boulevard, Yazoo City, Mississippi

Arnold Dwight “Gatemouth” Moore was one of America’s most popular blues singers in the 1940s before becoming a renowned religious leader, radio announcer, and gospel singer. He served as pastor of several churches in Mississippi and Louisiana, including the Bethel A. M. E. Church and Lintonia A. M. E. Church in Yazoo City. Moore, who was born in Topeka, Kansas, on November 8, 1913, spent much of his career in Memphis, Kansas City, and Chicago. He died in Yazoo City on May 19, 2004. Gatemouth Moore was the tuxedoed toast of the blues world when he strode from the gambling table to the stage of Chicago’s Club DeLisa one December night in 1948. But when he tried to sing, nothing came out, until, finally, he broke into the old spiritual, “Shine On Me.” According to a columnist for Chicago’s African American newspaper the Defender, Moore “ran off the stage and about seven blocks in the snow screaming and yelling ‘I’m saved.’” This was but one of many dramatic and colorful moments in the career of Moore, who entered the ministry and remained a newsworthy national personality in all his varied fields of endeavor.

A descendant of emancipated slaves who emigrated to Kansas from Tennessee during the historic “Exoduster” resettlement movement of the late 1870s, Moore sang ballads and spirituals as a youngster in Topeka. In his teens he left with a traveling show, joined the Port Gibson-based Rabbit Foot Minstrels, and ended up in Clarksdale around 1934. A year or so later he caught a ride to Memphis and launched a new career as a blues shouter. At a show in Atlanta an intoxicated woman gave him his nickname, he recalled: “I opened my mouth and she looked up and hollered, ‘Ah, sing it, you gatemouth S.O.B.!’” Moving between Memphis, Kansas City, and Chicago, he toured with some of the country’s top bands and wrote and recorded hits such as “I Ain’t Mad at You Pretty Baby,” “Did You Ever Love a Woman,” and “Somebody’s Got to Go.” Both B.B. King and Rufus Thomas considered Moore a major influence; they not only recorded his songs but remained close friends with him through the years.

Moore was ranked in the top rung of vocalists in national polls by the Defender when he felt the calling to preach. He carried his flair for showmanship with him into the ministry, as a gospel singer and recording artist, as the host of radio and television programs, and as a raconteur whose tales could stretch the limits of belief. His elegance and exuberance enabled him to easily cross social, racial, and religious lines, and though he devoted himself to the church, community work, charities, and education, he still enjoyed singing the blues on occasion. A pastor of both Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches, a leader of the “black Elks” (IBPOEW), president of the Birmingham Black Barons baseball team, and an emcee at both blues festivals and religious conventions, Moore once delivered a eulogy for the closing of the Club DeLisa and preached one famous sermon from a casket and another from a cross. In 1974 the A.M.E. Church assigned him to Yazoo City, where he married high school counselor Walterine Coleman. Moore, who attained the rank of bishop, received a brass note on the Beale Street Walk of Fame in 1996, and his widow was presented with a resolution in his honor by the Mississippi Senate in 2004.

Noted singers who have called Yazoo City home, in addition to Gatemouth Moore, include Jo Armstead, Kenzie Moore, and Robert Covington. Jo Armstead (b. 1944) left Yazoo City in 1961 to become an Ikette with the Ike and Tina Turner revue. She later co-wrote several R&B hits, including “Let’s Go Get Stoned,” “Jealous Kind of Fella,” and “Sock It To Me.” Kenzie Moore (1929-1987) was a football star and WAZF deejay who sang with the Joe Dyson band in Jackson and recorded “Let It Lay” and other songs for the Specialty label in 1953-54. Covington (1941-1996) played drums with a number of Chicago blues artists, most notably Sunnyland Slim, and was featured as a singer on the 1988 album *The Golden Voice of Robert Covington*.

GUITAR SLIM

County Road 101, Greenwood, Mississippi

Eddie Lee “Guitar Slim” Jones brought new levels of energy and intensity to electric guitar playing with his raw, incendiary approach in the 1950s. An impassioned singer and a flamboyant showman, Jones was best known for his classic recording “Things That I Used To Do.” Documentation of his early years is scant, but according to biographies, he was born in Greenwood on December 10, 1926. His father, Sam Jones, later lived on Race Track Plantation and is buried in the Salem M. B. Church Cemetery here.

Guitar Slim was the hottest name in the blues world in 1954 when he burst out of New Orleans with the smash hit “The Things That I Used to Do,” but in the Mississippi Delta where he was born and raised, people still knew him as Eddie Jones, a choir boy turned jitterbug dancer. Jones, whose mother died when he was a child, spent only his first few years in the Greenwood area and grew up in Hollandale with his maternal grandmother Mollie Edwards. Jones first attracted attention there for his sensational dancing, earning nicknames like “Limber Leg Eddie” or “Rubber Legs.” After Jones returned home from World War II service, Delta bluesmen Willie D. Warren and Little Bill Wallace recruited him to join them to perform in Arkansas and Louisiana. Jones, also known for his ability to imitate Louis Jordan and other singers at the time, ended up on his own in New Orleans where he first played the streets and house parties but soon emerged with a freshly developed command of the guitar and a new name, “Guitar Slim.” Guitarist Robert Nighthawk had been an early inspiration in Hollandale, but it was Texas maestro Gatemouth Brown whose style impacted Slim the most.

His recording of “The Things That I Used to Do” was the biggest rhythm & blues hit of 1954 and one of the three top R&B records of the entire ‘50s decade, according to Billboard magazine. Guitar Slim never had another hit of such proportions, but he thrilled audiences from coast to coast with his exciting live performances. Decked out in brightly colored suits and shoes with hair sometimes dyed to match or contrast, he combined dancing acrobatics with his guitar work, often strolled out the door with a 50- to 350-foot cord (estimates vary) to play guitar, and sang with the fervor of a fire-and-brimstone preacher. His offstage party life was just as wild. A troubled and serious side came through, however, in his heartfelt original lyrics, enough so that Atco Records advertised in 1958: “Guitar Slim is a philosopher. His songs are exclusively concerned with the earthy truisms of life.” The fast life finally wore Guitar Slim down and he succumbed to pneumonia in New York City on February 7, 1959. He was reportedly 32, although some documents suggest he may have been about two years older.

Guitar Slim has been cited as a major influence by many blues and rock guitarists, from Buddy Guy, Chick Willis, and Lonnie Brooks to Frank Zappa, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Billy Gibbons, and he has been called the predecessor of Jimi Hendrix for the free-spirited, ferocious way he attacked his guitar. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2007.

HARLEM INN

Highway 161, Winstonville, Mississippi

The Harlem Inn, known as “The Showplace of the South,” was once the Delta’s most important venue for touring national blues performers. B. B. King, Little Milton, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Howlin’ Wolf, Tyrone Davis, and T-Bone Walker were among the many stars who appeared, and Ike Turner and his Kings of Rhythm from Clarksdale gave some of their earliest performances here. The Harlem Inn stood at this site until it burned down in 1989, just prior to its 50th anniversary.

The Harlem Inn was built in 1939 by a local African American farmer, Hezekiah Patton, Sr., who launched his nightclub operation with twenty-five dollars provided by an uncle, according to Patton family lore. The uncle, James Patton (1898 to 1955), was already a successful club owner in Shelby. Hezekiah (1910 to 1968) first opened a smaller club across the railroad tracks in Winstonville (also formerly known as Chambers and Wyandotte) just west of here, and bought property to build a larger venue at this site after a new Highway 61 route was designated to run parallel to Old Highway 61 in the late 1930s. Business boomed at the Harlem Inn in the 1940s and ‘50s, and according to Hezekiah’s son, Robert Patton, patrons from towns throughout the Delta would take the train to Winstonville for the big Saturday night shows, stay overnight, and return home by rail the next day. The Harlem Inn was one of the state’s premier nightclubs, part of an elite circuit that included the Blue Room in Vicksburg, Stevens Rose Room in Jackson, Club Ebony in Indianola, the Harlem Nightingale in McComb, New Club Desire in Canton, and several black Elks (I.B.P.O.E.W.) and V.F.W. halls. Named in honor of the famed African American district of New York City, Patton’s club apparently had no connection to the many similarly named Harlem inns, clubs, and theaters in other Mississippi towns.

Patton, who continued to farm as well as operate the club, booked many of the biggest names in blues and rhythm & blues at the Harlem Inn, including Ray Charles, Little Willie John, Percy Mayfield, B. B. King, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Ivory Joe Hunter, T-Bone Walker, Howlin’ Wolf, and Big Joe Turner. Ike Turner and Little Milton began playing the Harlem Inn when both were local acts in the early ‘50s; in the 1960s Turner returned to the club leading the Ike & Tina Turner Revue.

After Patton’s death, a family friend, Lamar Crowder, rented the club for a few years, and in the early 1970s Patton’s sons, Robert, Charles, and Hezekiah, Jr., took over, assisted by their mother, Ruby. They maintained the tradition of top-flight entertainment, often drawing packed houses to see Bland, Little Milton, and Tyrone Davis. Jackie Wilson held an audience spellbound here on one of the many nights when the club’s audience of five to six hundred outnumbered the population of Winstonville. The Impressions, Bobby Rush, Joe Poonanny, and others also appeared, as did Delta locals including Little Wynn, the White Family, and T. J. and the Hurricanes. After a fire destroyed the club in May of 1989, Robert Patton recalled that Little Milton, who played at the club over a period of thirty-five years, said, “Your daddy put a blues monument here in Winstonville, and Winstonville will never be the same.”

HAROLD “HARDFACE” CLANTON

Main and Magnolia Streets, Tunica, Mississippi

Long before casinos brought legalized gambling and big-name entertainment to Tunica, African American entrepreneur Harold “Hardface” Clanton (1916 to 1982) ran a flourishing operation here that offered games of chance, bootleg liquor, and the best in blues music. Nicknamed for the stone face he wore during poker games, Clanton owned several businesses, including a cafe near this site and “The Barn” on Old Mhoon Landing Road, where most of the action took place.

Clanton was a legend not only in Tunica but across the country, in both blues and gambling circles. Though never elected to office, he was called “the black sheriff” of the county and was reputed to be Tunica's “first black millionaire” as well. Recalled with fondness and admiration by blacks and whites alike, Clanton operated in an era when Tunica County steered its own course when it came to gambling and alcohol statutes. Gambling helped fuel the economy, drawing money from the many out-of-town participants and providing employment for locals. Hardface's activities helped pave the way for Tunica County to legalize casino gambling in 1991. It was the first county on the Mississippi River to do so.

Clanton was born into a large farming family on May 29, 1916. He had only a grammar school education, according to his U.S. Army enlistment papers from 1943. However, his term in the military turned out to be both educational and profitable. He came home loaded with cash he had won from servicemen and with enough gaming experience to start a business of his own. He opened Harold's Cafe at 856 Magnolia Street in Tunica and later built “The Barn” four miles west of this site. He also raised cotton and at times ran cafes in West Memphis and on Prichard Road in Tunica. B. B. King, Bobby Bland, Howlin' Wolf, Ike Turner, Albert King, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2, Robert Nighthawk, Frank Frost, Houston Stackhouse, and many other renowned blues artists provided music for Hardface and his clientele. Many of the local bands Hardface hired were led by drummers: Sam Carr of Lula, James “Peck” Curtis of Helena, and the peg-legged Roosevelt “Barber” Parker of Tunica. Parker and his Silver Kings Band once had a radio show in Memphis on WDIA.

Hardface's reputation reached from Las Vegas to Cicero, Illinois, the Chicago suburb famed for its Mafia connections. According to a local anecdote, one Monday morning he was asked about the stacks of cash he had accrued. He replied, “Oh, some boys down from Cicero thought they knew how to throw the dice.” Dice games brought in the money for him in Tunica, but Clanton loved to play a three-card poker game called kotch or cotch. He traveled often to gamble himself, superstitiously choosing a different car for each road trip to Texas, Louisiana, or Vicksburg. Some say the nickname Hardface came from his famous poker face, while another story has it that during his younger days, he sometimes lived the gambling life 24 hours a day, sleeping with his face against the hard surface of the craps tables. Clanton died on June 4, 1982. So many people turned out to pay their respects that his funeral had to be held at the Rosa Fort High School gymnasium.

HENRY TOWNSEND

Broadway Street, Shelby

Henry Townsend, the only blues artist to have recorded during every decade from the 1920s to the 2000s, was born in Shelby on October 27, 1909. A longtime resident of St. Louis, where he was hailed as a patriarch of the local blues scene, Townsend died on September 24, 2006. Other performers from the Shelby area have included singers Erma Franklin, Jo Jo Murray, the Kelly Brothers, and Hattie Little, jazz legend Gerald Wilson, and bandleader Choker Campbell.

Townsend, a master guitarist and pianist, played an integral role in the vital St. Louis blues scene of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. His earliest years were spent in Shelby and then near Lula; the family was in Cairo, Illinois, when Townsend ran away from home and settled in St. Louis as a preteen. He made his recording debut in 1929, and during the 1930s he recorded in the company of leading blues artists including Roosevelt Sykes, John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, Robert Nighthawk, and Mississippi-born Big Joe Williams and Walter Davis. A prolific and spontaneous composer, Townsend claimed credit for writing the first version of the blues standard "Every Day I Have the Blues," recorded by Tupelo native Aaron "Pine Top" Sparks in 1935.

Townsend continued to record with Davis after World War II but began working more outside of music as a hotel manager and debt collector. In 1961 Townsend recorded his first album for folklorist Sam Charters, and over the next decades he toured, recorded several albums, and mentored younger artists in St. Louis. He received a prestigious National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1985. In 2008 he was awarded a posthumous Grammy for his participation on the album *Last of The Great Mississippi Delta Bluesmen - Live in Dallas*, which featured fellow nonagenarians Robert Lockwood, Honeyboy Edwards, and Pinetop Perkins.

Shelby was also the birthplace or childhood home of a number of performers who achieved later fame in Detroit, Chicago, and California. Erma Franklin (1938 to 2002), older sister of Aretha Franklin, recorded the first version of "Piece of My Heart," later popularized by Janis Joplin. Singer Hattie Little (1937 to 2000), once billed as the "New Queen of the Blues," and saxophonist-bandleader Walter "Choker" Campbell (1916 to 1993) both recorded for the Motown label group in Detroit. Trumpeter-bandleader Gerald Wilson (born in 1918) became an elder statesman of West Coast jazz after decades in the Los Angeles area. The Chicago area was the destination of the Kelly Brothers and their cousins, the Johns Brothers, as well as singer-guitarist Gus "Jo Jo" Murray and blues singer-bassist Willie Kent. Andrew (1935 to 2005), Curtis (born in 1937), and Robert Kelly (born in 1939) recorded gospel music and rhythm & blues and were billed both as the Kelly Brothers and the King Pins. Tenry "T. J." Johns (born in 1946) led the band T. J. and the Hurricanes in Shelby and later recorded in Chicago under the name "The King Kong Rocker." Kent (1936 to 2006), a favorite figure on the Chicago blues scene, recorded several albums and won numerous Blues Music Awards. Jo Jo Murray (born in 1947) remained a familiar figure in Shelby with frequent homecoming appearances at local clubs.

HICKORY STREET

100 block of North Hickory Street, Canton, Mississippi

Hickory Street, known locally as “The Hollow,” was a hub of social life, commerce, and entertainment for the African American community of central Mississippi for several decades, up through the 1970s. Canton’s most famous blues musician, Elmore James, performed often in the local cafes and clubs. James also learned the electronics trade by working at Robert’s Radio Repair on Hickory Street. His experiments with sound technology led him to develop a powerful and original electric blues style.

Hickory Street was once one of several centers of blues activity around Canton. Blues performers including Elmore James, B.B. King, Howlin’ Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 appeared at venues such as Bessie’s Hideaway and the Star Lite Café on Hickory Street, Club Delece on Franklin Street, Club Desire on Union Street, and the Blue Garden on Liberty Street, as well as at grocery stores and outdoors on the streets. East of town, the Sawmill Quarters, where employees of the Denkmann Lumber Company lived in shotgun houses, was another hot spot for blues. In rural Madison County, string bands and guitarists played at country suppers and dances; renowned local performers included guitarist William “Do-Boy” Diamond and fiddler Theodore Harris. Guitarist K.C. Douglas, from Sharon, north of Canton, recalled that Harris drew such crowds that when he played in town the streets had to be blocked off.

A prominent performer in the 1920s and ’30s, at the sawmill and at various nightspots in Canton, was Little Brother Montgomery, one of the foremost blues pianists of the era. Montgomery once shared piano duties at the sawmill camp with Sunnyland Slim, and also traveled with a Canton-based jazz group, Eugene Watts’s Serenaders. The Montgomery family later moved to Canton to work for the lumber company. The family included pianists Joe and Tollie Montgomery and nephew Paul Gayten (later a major New Orleans R&B bandleader).

Elmore James became a popular act with the sawmill crowd in the early 1950s, when he lived and worked in Canton with guitarist Robert Earl Holston, owner of Robert’s Radio Repair at 153 Hickory Street. Holston helped James devise ways to amplify his guitar, which he played with a slide (a steel tube) on his finger. James did some of his first recordings at Club Desire. His influential records made him a model for slide guitarists around the world, famed for a distinctive sound that came to fruition here in Canton.

Hickory Street’s blues tradition has been celebrated in more recent years by the Hickory Street Festival, which began in the 1980s, and by guitarist Jessie Primer, Jr., on his 2002 CD *Dancin’ On Hickory Street (The Hollow)*. Canton has also been home to blues recording artists Johnnie Temple, John Lee Henley, and Grady Champion, as well as jazz saxophonist Jessie Primer III, Louisiana slide guitarist Sonny Landreth, Nashville studio guitarist Bucky Barrett, and gospel singers Cleophus Robinson, Sister Thea Bowman, and the Canton Spirituals.

HIGHWAY 61 BLUES

Tunica Visitors Center, Highway 61, Tunica, Mississippi

U. S. Highway 61, known as the "blues highway," rivals Route 66 as the most famous road in American music lore. Dozens of blues artists have recorded songs about Highway 61, including Mississippians Sunnyland Slim, James "Son" Thomas, "Honeyboy" Edwards, Big Joe Williams, Joe McCoy, Charlie Musselwhite, Eddie Shaw, Johnny Young, Eddie Burns, and Mississippi Fred McDowell. The original route, now called Old Highway 61, was just west of here.

Travel has been a popular theme in blues lyrics, and highways have symbolized the potential to quickly "pack up and go," leave troubles behind, or seek out new opportunities elsewhere. As the major route northward out of Mississippi, U. S. Highway 61 has been of particular inspiration to blues artists. The original road began in downtown New Orleans, traveled through Baton Rouge, and ran through Natchez, Vicksburg, Leland, Cleveland, Clarksdale, and Tunica in Mississippi, to Memphis and north to the Canadian border. Mississippi artists who lived near Highway 61 included B. B. King, Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Son House, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller), Ike Turner, Robert Nighthawk, Sunnyland Slim, Honeyboy Edwards, Sam Cooke, James Cotton, Jimmy Reed, and Junior Parker.

The first song recorded about the road was Roosevelt Sykes's "Highway 61 Blues," cut in 1932; at the time Sykes was a resident of St. Louis, the first major city along Highway 61 above the Mason-Dixon line. In 1933 two Memphis bluesmen, Jack Kelly and Will Batts, recorded "Highway No. 61 Blues," and the Tupelo-born Sparks Brothers cut "61 Highway." Other 1930s recordings included "Highway 61," a sermon by Raymond, Mississippi, native "Hallelujah Joe" McCoy; "Highway 61" by Jesse James; and "Highway 61 Blues" by Sampson Pittman, recorded for Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress. In 1947 Gatemouth Moore recorded a jump blues version of "Highway 61 Blues," and in 1956 pianist Sunnyland Slim (Albert Luandrew) of Vance, Mississippi, recorded "Highway 61." Over the next decades Highway 61 songs often appeared on albums by James "Son" Thomas of Leland, Honeyboy Edwards, Big Joe Williams, Mississippi Fred McDowell, and other traditional blues veterans.

Although many bluesmen used the lyrics "Highway 61, longest road that I know," their descriptions of the highway's route were often misleading. Some suggested that the road started at the Gulf of Mexico (100 miles south of New Orleans) and ran through Atlanta, New York City, or Chicago. Many Mississippians certainly did begin their migrations to Chicago via Highway 61, but most finished their journeys by continuing from St. Louis to the Windy City along the famous Route 66. In 1965 the road gained an even more mythological reputation when Bob Dylan recorded his influential album "Highway 61 Revisited." Dylan was well versed in the blues, but his inspiration may also have come from the fact that Highway 61 ran through his home state of Minnesota.

HILL COUNTRY BLUES

North Center Street and East College Avenue, Holly Springs, Mississippi

Although Delta blues often claims the spotlight, other styles of the blues were produced in other regions of Mississippi. In the greater Holly Springs area, musicians developed a “hill country” blues style characterized by few chord changes, unconventional song structures, and an emphasis on the "groove" or a steady, driving rhythm. In the 1990s this style was popularized through the recordings of local musicians R.L. Burnside and David “Junior” Kimbrough.

R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough became unlikely heroes of the music world in the 1990s when their “hill country” style caught on in both blues and alternative rock music circles. Although Burnside (1926 to 2005) and Kimbrough (1930 to 1998) had both begun recording in the 1960s, they had mostly performed at local juke joints or house parties. Most of their early recordings had been made by field researchers and musicologists such as George Mitchell, David Evans of the University of Memphis, and Sylvester Oliver of Rust College. They developed a new, younger following after they appeared in the 1991 documentary *Deep Blues* and recorded for the Oxford-based Fat Possum label, and college students and foreign tourists mixed with locals at Kimbrough’s legendary juke joint in Chulahoma. Both artists toured widely and inspired musicians from Kansas to Norway to emulate their hill country sounds. Their songs were recorded by artists including the Black Keys and the North Mississippi Allstars, and remixes of Burnside tracks appeared in films, commercials, and the HBO series *The Sopranos*. The music of actor Samuel L. Jackson’s blues-singing character in the 2006 movie *Black Snake Moan* was largely inspired by Burnside.

Burnside, born in Lafayette County, was influenced by blues stars John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters but also learned directly from local guitarists Mississippi Fred McDowell and Ranie Burnette. For most of his life Burnside worked as a farmer and fisherman. He only began to perform at festivals and in Europe in the 1970s. Burnside’s music took a more modern turn when sons Joseph, Daniel, and Duwayne Burnside and son-in-law Calvin Jackson played with him in his Sound Machine band. By the early '90s Burnside was performing around the world in a trio with grandson Cedric Burnside and “adopted son” Kenny Brown. Following Burnside’s death his family, including grandson Kent Burnside, continued to perform his music, as did his protege Robert Belfour, a Holly Springs native who also recorded for the Fat Possum label.

Just as Burnside’s music reflected his jovial personality, the more introspective Junior Kimbrough produced singular music with a darker approach. Born into a musical family in Hudsonville, Kimbrough formed his first band in the late 1950s and recorded a single for the Philwood label in Memphis in 1968. In the 1980s his band, the Soul Blues Boys, featured longtime bassist Little Joe Ayers. In later years he was backed by his son Kinney on drums and R.L. Burnside’s son Garry on bass. Kimbrough’s multi-instrumentalist son David Malone devoted himself to carrying on his father’s legacy as well as developing his own style on recordings for Fat Possum and other labels.

HONEYBOY EDWARDS

White Oak Street, Shaw, Mississippi

David “Honeyboy” Edwards, born in Shaw on June 28, 1915, took to the road as a teenager accompanying Big Joe Williams and became a true “rambling” bluesman. Later Edwards traveled with other artists, including Robert Johnson. Edwards recorded blues for the Library of Congress and the Sun and Chess labels, but he is also revered for his colorful tales of the lives of early Delta bluesmen.

Nicknamed “Honeyboy” by his sister, he started playing guitar at age twelve, learning from his father, Henry Edwards, and as a teenager from pioneer bluesmen including Tommy Johnson and Charley Patton. In 1932 bluesman Big Joe Williams took Edwards under his wing, teaching him valuable lessons about how to survive on the road. Edwards later traveled widely, often as a hobo on freight trains, skillfully avoiding arrests for vagrancy. He became a good gambler, and often played blues for tips until he made enough to enter games. Edwards described the life of the itinerant bluesman, relaying both its joys and difficulties, in his 1997 autobiography *The World Don't Owe Me Nothin'*.

In 1937 and 1938 Edwards worked with Robert Johnson and attended Johnson's final performance in the Greenwood area in 1938, when Johnson was allegedly poisoned. Other artists he worked with in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Memphis included the Memphis Jug Band, Big Walter Horton, Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller), Tommy McClennan, and Little Walter Jacobs.

In 1942 Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress recorded Edwards in Clarksdale, and in 1951 Edwards made his first commercial recordings in Houston, Texas, for the ARC label as “Mr. Honey.” He also recorded for the Sun and Chess labels in the '50s, but the sessions were not issued until the 1970s. In 1956 Edwards settled with his wife in Chicago, where he found work as a laborer and performed with Big Walter, Carey Bell, and others. In 1969 he was a guest on an album by the British band Fleetwood Mac and over the subsequent decades recorded many albums on Folkways, Earwig and other labels. Edwards's charming personality, storytelling skills, and memories of early blues artists were captured in the 2002 documentary *Honeyboy*, which included footage filmed in Shaw.

Most blues activity in Shaw over the years has been in juke joints such as the White House, the Riverside Inn, the One Minute, and Fox's, although small local blues festivals have been held on occasion since the 1990s. Shaw was also the birthplace of Louis Satterfield (1937 to 2004), a prominent studio musician for Chess Records in Chicago and trombonist with the group Earth, Wind & Fire, and of Clarksdale guitarist and Delta Blues Museum educator Michael “Dr. Mike” James (born 1965).

HOT TAMALES AND THE BLUES

Main and Brown Streets, Rosedale, Mississippi

In his 1936 recording "They're Red Hot," bluesman Robert Johnson employed the imagery of a tamale vendor to describe a woman. Made of corn meal and meat, the tamale was a staple in the diet of Mexican migrant laborers in the Delta and became a popular item of local cuisine. Some historians maintain that U.S. soldiers brought tamale recipes home with them from the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) or that tamales date back to indigenous American Indian cultures.

Hot tamales may seem an odd food to encounter in the Mississippi Delta, but their presence reflects the region's cultural diversity. Hundreds of years ago local Native Americans prepared a tamale-like dish of maize cooked in cornhusks, and in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, culinary traditions of Anglo- and African-Americans in the Delta were complemented by the foodways of new immigrants of Lebanese, Chinese and Italian origin. By the 1920s many African-American agricultural workers had left the Delta for points north, and planters responded by recruiting Mexican laborers, who generally stayed only through the harvesting season. Another wave of Mexican migration to the Delta came with the onset of World War II, when the federal government started the Bracero Program to regulate and address labor shortages resulting from many local workers' being drafted or moving north for wartime industry jobs.

Although likely introduced to the area by Mexican laborers, the tamale was quickly embraced by African Americans and has persisted in the Delta because of family tradition, public demand, and out of simple necessity. Whereas tamales in Mexico are usually steamed, tamales in the Delta are often simmered and served with the cooking water, with countless variations. In Helena, Arkansas, a Sicilian family recipe incorporated traditional Italian meats and spices. A major appeal of tamales to laborers was that they would stay warm during the day because they were wrapped in cornhusks and bundled tightly. Tamales were initially sold by street vendors and later from stands, groceries, restaurants, and blues clubs, including Ruby's Nite Spot in Leland. In addition to Robert Johnson's 1936 recording "They're Red Hot," later covered by Johnny Shines, Cassandra Wilson, and others, tamale imagery was featured in "Molly Man" by Moses "Old Man Mose" Mason (1928) and "Hot Tamale Molly" by Lucille Hegamin (1925). Library of Congress folklorist Herbert Halpert also recorded "Hot Tamales (Street Vendor's Cry)" by F. W. Lindsey in Greenville in 1939.

Mexican music may not have had a strong direct relationship with blues, but early Texas bluesmen probably saw parallels between themselves and the Mexican street singer, the trovador or guitarero. Latin music more generally played a significant role in the development of the blues. Jelly Roll Morton spoke of the "Latin tinge" that helped shape blues and jazz in New Orleans. The habanera rhythm appears in the 1914 composition "St. Louis Blues" by W. C. Handy, who had visited Cuba with a minstrel troupe around 1900. Handy also owned a Mexican guitar. In the post-WWII years Latin music had a strong influence on rhythm & blues, as evidenced by the Afro-Cuban clave rhythm in the music of Bo Diddley and the rumba and mambo rhythms in songs by Fats Domino, Professor Longhair, Ray Charles, Louis Jordan, B. B. King, Muddy Waters, and Jimmy Reed.

HOWLIN' WOLF

510 East Broad Street, West Point, Mississippi

One of the giants of post-World War II Chicago blues, Chester Arthur Burnett, aka "Howlin' Wolf," was born in White Station, just north of West Point, on June 10, 1910. In his early teens Burnett began performing in the Delta and was later a pioneer in electrifying the Delta blues. After moving north, Burnett nonetheless remained a strong presence on the Mississippi blues scene by returning home often for visits and performances.

An imposing figure both physically and artistically, Burnett was named after U.S. President Chester Arthur. Burnett's grandfather gave him the nickname "Wolf." He learned to play a one-string "diddley bow" and harmonica as a child, but his early life was difficult. Cast out by his mother, Burnett lived in White Station with his great uncle until he ran away from home at 13 and hitched a train to the Delta.

On the Young and Morrow plantation near Ruleville he had a warm reunion with his father, who bought him his first guitar in 1928. Burnett soon fell under the wing of blues pioneer Charley Patton, who taught him showmanship and songs that Burnett would later record, including "Pony Blues." Burnett developed a distinctive style, highlighted by his naturally raspy voice and howling, a technique he developed by trying to imitate Jimmie Rodgers's signature yodels. As "Howlin' Wolf" he performed in the region with bluesmen including Johnny Shines, Floyd Jones, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2, and Robert Johnson. Every spring he returned from his wide travels to plow his father's farmland.

After serving in the Army from 1941 to 1943, "Wolf" took up farming, and in 1948 moved to West Memphis, Arkansas, where he formed an electric blues band and hosted a radio show on KWEM. Wolf's music caught the attention of Memphis producer Sam Phillips, who famously recalled: "When I heard Howlin' Wolf, I said, 'This is for me. This is where the soul of man never dies.'" Phillips first recorded Wolf in 1951 for the RPM and Chess labels. In 1953 Wolf moved to Chicago, where he continued to record for Chess, waxing classics such as "Spoonful," "Killing Floor," "Back Door Man," "I Ain't Superstitious," and "Howlin' For My Darling" with protégé Hubert Sumlin on guitar.

Wolf's music reached new audiences in the 1960s, when his songs were covered by artists including Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Cream, and the Doors. His own 1956 recording "Smokestack Lightnin'" even became a hit on the pop music charts in England in 1964. Wolf's music remained popular down South long after he moved to Chicago. He frequently returned to this area to visit friends, hunt and fish, and performed at local venues such as Ferdinand Sykes's place on Cottrell Street in West Point, Roxy's juke joint in White Station, and the Chicken Shack in Union Star. He died on January 10, 1976, in Hines, Illinois. West Point established a festival in his honor in 1996 and a museum in 2005.

HUBERT SUMLIN

West River Road Extended, Greenwood, Mississippi

Hubert Sumlin's sizzling guitar playing energized many of the classic Chicago blues records of Howlin' Wolf in the 1950s and '60s. His reputation in blues and rock circles propelled him to a celebrated career on his own after Wolf's death in 1976. In 2003 *Rolling Stone* magazine christened him one of "The 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time." Sumlin was born on the Pillow plantation in a house that stood just west of this site on November 16, 1931.

Sumlin grew up in Mississippi and Arkansas hearing his churchgoing mother admonish him for playing "the devil's music"—the blues. But he found out, after sneaking in some blues licks on his guitar in church, that the sounds of the blues could win over even his mother. Sumlin's innovative musicianship and endearing nature won the hearts of many musicians and admirers in the decades to follow. His boyhood partner, harmonica legend James Cotton, remained a lifelong friend. From 1954 to 1976 Howlin' Wolf was as much a father figure to Sumlin as he was his musical employer. In later years Sumlin was adopted by a wide range of musicians, club owners, promoters, and producers who crafted a niche for him as a special guest or featured soloist.

Sumlin started playing guitar in church, but was performing blues with James Cotton by the time the two were in their teens, after the Sumlin family had moved from Greenwood to Hughes, Arkansas. Hubert was awestruck at seeing Howlin' Wolf rock the house at a local juke joint, and when Wolf later offered him a spot in his band in Chicago, Sumlin bade farewell to Cotton and to his family in Arkansas. Sumlin's years with Wolf were highlighted by groundbreaking recordings such as "Killing Floor," "300 Pounds of Joy," "Smokestack Lightning," and "Shake For Me" for the Chess label in Chicago. Wolf, a stern disciplinarian, fired his protégé on numerous occasions, only to rehire him every time. At one time Hubert even joined the band of Wolf's main rival, Muddy Waters. He also played guitar on records by Muddy, Chuck Berry, Jimmy Reed, Willie Dixon, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller), Eddie Taylor, Sunnyland Slim, Carey Bell, Eddie Shaw, James Cotton, and many others.

When Sumlin and Wolf toured Europe on the 1964 American Folk Blues Festival, Hubert made his first recordings under his own name in Germany and England. His only 45 rpm single came from an acoustic blues session which also marked the first release on the historic Blue Horizon label in England. In later years he recorded albums for labels in France, Germany, Argentina, and the United States. Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan are two of the many guitarists who have named Sumlin as a favorite. He shared stages with Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, Santana, Aerosmith, and many others. On the award-winning album *About Them Shoes* Hubert was joined by Clapton, Keith Richards, Levon Helm, and James Cotton. On May 7, 2008, the day after the unveiling of this marker, Sumlin was inducted into the Blues Foundation's Blues Hall of Fame.

IKE TURNER

127 Third Street, Clarksdale, Mississippi

Rock 'n' roll and rhythm & blues pioneer Ike Turner began his career playing blues and boogie woogie piano in Clarksdale. Turner was born less than a mile south-west of this site, at 304 Washington Avenue in the Riverton neighborhood, on November 5, 1931. In his pre-teen years he got a job here at the Hotel Alcazar, where he operated the elevator and did janitorial work. Turner later rose to fame as a deejay, producer, and leader of the Kings of Rhythm band and the Ike & Tina Turner Revue.

Turner, a perfectionist driven to create, take charge, and succeed, filled many roles during an illustrious but controversial career. Although best known for his turbulent years with Tina Turner in the 1960s and '70s, he had already emerged as an important musical figure while still a teenager in Clarksdale, years before the Ike & Tina phenomenon began.

His father, Izear Luster Turner, a carpenter, railroad employee and preacher, died when Ike was seven, and he went to work to help his mother, seamstress Beatrice Turner. When she bought him a piano, Turner ditched formal lessons to listen to blues pianist Pinetop Perkins and later earned a spot playing in Robert Nighthawk's band in local juke joints and on WROX radio. After watching WROX announcers John Friskillo and Early Wright, Turner launched his own career as a deejay. He also joined the Top Hatters, a band of youngsters trained by Clarksdale dentist Dr. Eugene Mason, before founding the Kings of Rhythm. The Kings of Rhythm at times included Clarksdale area musicians Raymond Hill, Jackie Brenston, Johnny O'Neal, Willie "Bad Boy" Sims, Edward Nash, Eugene Fox, Clayton Love, Ernest Lane, and Willie Kizart, as well as Ike's cousin, C. V. Veal, nephew Jesse Knight, Jr., and wives or girlfriends Bonnie Turner and Annie Mae Wilson.

In March of 1951 Turner took the group to Memphis, where they recorded several songs including the No. 1 R&B hit often regarded as the first rock 'n' roll record, "Rocket '88'," featuring Jackie Brenston on vocals with the band credited as the Delta Cats. Turner busily arranged for other artists, including Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, and Little Milton, to record for Chess, Sun, Modern, and other labels during the next few years at various sites around the South, often traveling with the Bihari brothers of Modern Records. He also produced sessions in Clarksdale at WROX, at the Greyhound bus maintenance shop, and in his own studio.

In between stays in West Memphis, Memphis, and Sarasota, Florida, Turner continued to use Clarksdale as a home base before relocating to East St. Louis in 1954 and then moving to California. He continued to front new configurations of the Kings of Rhythm and became better known as an explosive guitarist and creator of the popular Ike and Tina Turner Revue. Later publicity surrounding his abusive relationship with Tina, drug addiction, and a prison term permanently scarred Turner's image, but he managed a comeback with the support of the international blues community. He was elected to both the Blues and Rock and Roll Halls of Fame and won a Grammy for his final CD, *Risin' With the Blues*, in 2007. Turner died in San Marcos, California, on December 12, 2007.

ISHMON BRACEY

2185 Fortune Street, Jackson, Mississippi

One of the earliest blues musicians from Mississippi to make recordings, Ishmon Bracey (1899-1970) is buried in the nearby Willow Park Cemetery. In the 1920s and '30s Bracey was a leading bluesman in the Jackson area and performed with prominent artists including Tommy Johnson, Rube Lacy, and Charlie McCoy. In the early '50s Bracey became an ordained minister and left the blues behind.

Bracey was born in Byram, about ten miles south of Jackson, in January 1899, according to census records. He learned guitar from locals Louis Cooper and Lee Jones and moved to Jackson in the late 1920s after encountering Tommy Johnson, one of Mississippi's most prominent bluesmen, in Johnson's longtime home of Crystal Springs. Bracey soon became one of the most popular musicians in the Jackson area's vital blues scene, which consisted largely of musicians who were likewise born in small communities in the area. These included Johnson, his brothers LeDell, Clarence, and Mager, and R. D. "Peg Leg Sam" Norwood of Crystal Springs; Rubin Lacy, Shirley Griffith, John Henry "Bubba" Brown, "Son" Spand, and brothers Luther and Percy Huff, all of Rankin County; brothers Joe and Charlie McCoy of Raymond; Johnnie Temple of Canton; Lucien "Slim" Duckett of Tylertown; and, from Bolton, Walter Vinson, Caldwell "Mississippi" Bracy, and the Chatmon family (brothers Bo, Harry, Lonnie, and several others).

Jackson blues in the 1920s had a lighter feel than its counterpart in the Delta and sometimes featured the mandolin and the fiddle. Bracey and other musicians often played at dances for both black and white audiences, performing waltzes and ragtime numbers, and otherwise serenaded passersby on the busy streets of Jackson. Bracey's music came to broader attention after he auditioned for recording agent H. C. Speir, who operated a furniture store on North Farish Street. Speir arranged for Bracey and Tommy Johnson to make their debut recordings at a session for Victor in Memphis in February of 1928. At that session and another for Victor later that year, Bracey was accompanied on guitar and mandolin by Charlie McCoy. Bracey recorded in more of a jazz mode in late 1929 and early 1930 for the Paramount label in Grafton, Wisconsin, backed by the New Orleans Nehi Boys (Charlie Taylor on piano and "Kid" Ernest Moliere on clarinet, an instrument rarely heard on Mississippi blues recordings). Bracey's musical breadth is suggested in the 1930 census, where his occupation is listed as a musician in a "hotel orchestra."

By the mid-'30s many of the musicians in Bracey's circle had left the area, and his musical partnership with Tommy Johnson ended. In later city directories he is listed as a laborer or painter. In 1963, when blues researcher Gayle Dean Wardlow met and interviewed him in Jackson, Bracey had been a Baptist minister for over a decade, and, although he would no longer play blues, he provided important information on the early blues scene in Jackson. He died on Feb. 12, 1970.

JACK OWENS

Highway 433 at Rose Hill Road, Bentonia, Mississippi

Jack Owens became one of Mississippi's most venerated blues artists in the 1980s and '90s after spending most of his life as a farmer in Yazoo County. Born November 17, 1904, or 1906 according to some sources, Owens did not perform outside the state of Mississippi until 1988. During his final years he and his harmonica player, Bud Spires, traveled together to many festivals and performed on Owens's front porch for hundreds of visitors. Owens died on February 9, 1997.

Owens belonged to the pioneering generation of Bentonia bluesmen, which included Nehemiah "Skip" James (1902-1969) and Henry Stuckey (1897-1966). Stuckey is often regarded as the seminal local blues figure, but researchers have yet to discover any recordings or photographs of him. James ranks as Bentonia's most internationally renowned musician, known for the striking quality of the music on his 1931 recordings for the Paramount label and for a briefly rejuvenated career during the blues revival of the 1960s. Just as James's recording career was nearing its end, Owens was beginning his, in 1966; his first album, produced by musicologist Dr. David Evans, was not released until 1971. But during the following decades Owens became Bentonia's resident celebrity. Local citizens grew accustomed to the sight of tour buses, vans, and cars with out-of-state license plates, sometimes loaded with cameras and recording equipment, heading for Owens's house just north of this site off Rose Hill Road.

The music of Owens and James, as Evans wrote, was distinguished by "haunting, brooding lyrics dealing with such themes as loneliness, death and the supernatural . . . Altogether it is one of the eeriest, loneliest and deepest blues sounds ever recorded." Neither Owens's music nor his lifestyle in Bentonia changed much over the years. He clung to old ways and superstitions, including burying money in the ground and hanging bottles from his trees, and was reputed to be the last farmer in the area to plow with a mule. He once made moonshine and ran juke joints in or near his house. Even in his nineties he kept a pistol or shotgun at hand but claimed he had not shot anyone in several years. Documentary filmmakers were duly fascinated, and Owens appeared in Alan Lomax's *Land Where the Blues Began* and Robert Mugge's *Deep Blues*, as well as a commercial for Levi's 501 Blues. After making a few festival appearances in Mississippi, he accepted offers to perform in Atlanta, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, Europe, and elsewhere, and took his first plane flight in 1992. The National Endowment for the Arts awarded him a National Heritage Fellowship in 1993.

Owens is buried in the Day Cemetery east of Bentonia. Only at his funeral was his real name, L. F. Nelson, revealed. He left protégés Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, proprietor of the Blue Front café, and harmonica player Benjamin "Bud" Spires to carry on the Bentonia blues tradition. Spires, who was born in Anding on May 20, 1931, was Owens's steadfast musical companion for some thirty years. He was the son of guitarist Arthur "Big Boy" Spires (1912-1990), a Yazoo County native who moved to Chicago and recorded several songs that are considered classics of down-home postwar blues.

JAMES COTTON

Highway 61 and Bonnie Bell Road, Clayton, Mississippi

James Cotton, one of the world's most popular and dynamic blues harmonica players, was born just east of this site on the Bonnie Blue Plantation on July 1, 1935. Cotton apprenticed with harmonica master Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller) in Helena, Arkansas, and spent twelve years in Muddy Waters's band in Chicago. In 1966 Cotton left Muddy to start his own band, and later earned the nickname "Mr. Superharp" for his high-energy performances.

Cotton took to the blues life at an early age. He used his first harmonica, a gift from his mother, to imitate the sounds of trains and cackling hens, when he was five or six years old. But blues music was unwelcome in his parents' religious household, and Cotton preferred to stay with his bachelor uncle, Wiley Green, who made bootleg whiskey, gambled, and played blues piano. In about 1944 Green introduced Cotton to Sonny Boy Williamson, who was broadcasting the blues over KFFA radio in Helena, Arkansas. Williamson took the youngster in, and Cotton lived with Williamson and his wife Mattie for several years, first in Helena and then in West Memphis.

When Williamson moved from West Memphis, he left his band and his radio show on KWEM with his protege. Cotton found himself unprepared to be a bandleader, however, and ended up working as an ice hauler, short order cook, shoe shine boy, and dump truck driver, although he continued to perform with Howlin' Wolf, Willie Nix, and others. In 1952 he made his first studio appearance at Sam Phillips's Memphis Recording Service, playing harmonica on Wolf's Chess recording "Saddle My Pony." Phillips called Cotton back into the studio in 1953-54 to cut his first tracks as a singer for Sun Records, including "Straighten Up Baby" and "Cotton Crop Blues." In 1954 Muddy Waters needed a harmonica player to replace Junior Wells, who had left the band during a Southern tour, and when he got to Memphis, Waters hired Cotton. Cotton moved to Chicago and put in more years with the band than any of Muddy's other harmonica players, while continuing to record singles and assorted album tracks on his own, including two records made in England in 1961. Cotton formed the James Cotton Blues Band in 1966. Through friendships with Chicagoans Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield, who were instrumental in bringing the blues to rock audiences of the 1960s, Cotton signed with Butterfield's manager, Albert Grossman, who also represented Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin. Cotton was subsequently able to work consistently at both rock venues and blues clubs and festivals while recording albums for Verve, Vanguard, and many other labels.

Though throat surgery forced him to curtail his singing in the 1990s, he continued to perform as one of the world's premier blues harmonicists, heralded for his explosive style and for his mission to carry on the legacy of the blues masters who groomed him. A recipient of several Blues Music Awards, Cotton also won the 1996 Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Album with his CD *Deep in the Blues*. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2006.

JAMES "SON" THOMAS

309 North Broad Street, Leland, Mississippi

James Henry "Son" Thomas, internationally famed blues musician and folk sculptor, worked as a porter at the Montgomery Hotel, which once occupied this site, after he moved to Leland in 1961. Born in the Yazoo County community of Eden on October 14, 1926, Thomas made his first recordings for folklorist Bill Ferris in 1968. He later traveled throughout the United States and Europe to perform at blues concerts and exhibit his artwork. Thomas died in Greenville on June 26, 1993.

Thomas was one of the most recognized local musical figures in Mississippi during the 1970s and '80s. He performed throughout the state at nightclubs, festivals, private parties, government social affairs, colleges, and juke joints. He also toured and recorded several blues albums in Europe, and his folk art was featured at galleries in New York, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. Thomas learned guitar as a youngster after hearing his grandfather, Eddie Collins, and uncle, Joe Cooper, at house parties in Yazoo County. He later saw the two blues legends he regarded as his main influences, Elmore James and Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, as well as Bentonia bluesman Jack Owens, from whom he learned the song "Nothin' But the Devil." After he began playing jukes with Cooper, Percy Lee, and others, Thomas became so well-known for his rendition of the Lil' Son Jackson tune "Cairo Blues" that he earned the nickname "Cairo." He was also known as "Sonny Ford," so named for his childhood fondness for making clay models of Ford tractors.

In 1961, with a wife and six children to support on a sharecropper's income, Thomas decided to move to Leland to find better-paying work. His mother got him a job at the Montgomery Hotel where she worked, but soon Thomas joined his stepfather as a gravedigger and later worked at a furniture store. His performances had been confined to juke joints and house parties until he met Bill Ferris, who began recording and filming Thomas and other local bluesmen in 1968. The Xtra label in England released the first recordings of Thomas, who later made albums for the Mississippi-based Southern Culture, Rustron, and Rooster Blues labels as well as companies in France, Holland, and Germany.

He also appeared in several documentary films. Despite his international renown and increased income, Thomas continued to live in bare, dilapidated shotgun houses. It fit his image, he said, knowing that blues fans, art buyers, and photographers would come looking for him. The most important place for him to earn his living was often not out on the concert circuit but at his house, where visitors would show up at his doorstep with money to hear him play or buy a skull or coffin he had sculpted. Thomas's gaunt appearance and the deathly themes of much of his artwork led to neighborhood rumors that he was a "hoodoo man." But his magic lay in his ability to purvey his art and music, and his songs and stories were permeated by a droll sense of humor rather than darkness. His son Raymond "Pat" Thomas earned his own niche as an authentic bluesman and folk artisan, especially noted for his drawings of cats' heads.

J. B. LENOIR

211 Brinson Street, Monticello, Mississippi

Monticello area native J. B. Lenoir (1929-1967) was best known during his lifetime for his 1955 hit "Mama, Talk to Your Daughter," but he also played an important role in blues history because of his political engagement. In the 1960s Lenoir recorded a body of topical songs in Chicago that addressed discrimination, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War. Lenoir's cousin Byther Smith from Monticello also became a Chicago blues recording artist, noted for his cutting-edge lyrics.

J. B. Lenoir (pronounced and sometimes misspelled "Lenore") was a distinctive blues artist, in both his high-pitched singing style and the candid political critiques in many of his song lyrics. Born on his family's farm near Monticello on March 5, 1929, he learned to play guitar from his father, Devitt (or Dewitt) Lenoir, Sr.; as a youth he also played with his brother Dewitt, Jr. Lenoir decided to leave because of racial discrimination and later recalled, "After the way they treat my daddy I was never goin' to stand that no kind of way." Lenoir began traveling to play music in his teens. He lived in Gulfport and worked at the Splendid Cafe there at one point in the 1940s, and he said he later performed in New Orleans with Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller) and Elmore James. By 1949 Lenoir had settled in Chicago, where blues kingpin Big Bill Broonzy took him "as his son." Lenoir also performed with Memphis Minnie, Muddy Waters, and Little Walter, and soon formed his own band, J. B. and his Bayou Boys, with Sunnyland Slim on piano.

While the subject matter of most of Lenoir's singles on various labels was conventional for a blues artist, his first recordings, in 1950, included the topical "Korea Blues." A 1954 release, "Eisenhower Blues," resulted in controversy, and Parrot Records owner Al Benson took Lenoir back into the studio to rerecord the song as the more generic "Tax Paying Blues"; both issues featured "I'm in Korea" on the flip side. In 1965-66 Lenoir recorded a number of political songs for European release, including "Shot on James Meredith," "Alabama March," "Born Dead," "Vietnam Blues," and the biting "Down in Mississippi," for producer Willie Dixon at the behest of German promoters Horst Lippman and Fritz Rau. Lenoir and his Afro-American Blues Band performed some of these songs during a 1965 tour of Europe. The material was reportedly deemed too controversial for release in the United States at the time and only appeared on American labels years later. Lenoir died on April 29, 1967, in Urbana, Illinois, due to complications resulting from an auto accident. In 2003 Lenoir's music gained more attention when he was featured in the Wim Wenders documentary "The Soul of a Man," and in 2011 he was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame.

Byther Smith, whose mother was a sister of Dewitt Lenoir, Sr., moved to Chicago in 1956 in hopes of joining Lenoir's band as a bass player. Those plans never worked out, but Smith played bass or guitar with some of Chicago's top bluesmen, including Otis Rush, Junior Wells, Fenton Robinson, and Sunnyland Slim, and made a number of distinctive recordings leading his own band. Born near Monticello on April 17, 1932, Smith first played guitar in a Memphis gospel group, worked as a drummer in Jackson, and learned to play upright bass in a country band in Arizona. While many of his songs dealt with standard blues themes, he sometimes used political topics, and his most intense songs often revolved around death, violence, and personal tragedies.

JESSIE MAE HEMPHILL

Senatobia Memorial Cemetery, Senatobia, Mississippi

One of the few female performers of country blues, Jessie Mae Hemphill (c. 1923 – 2006) was a multi-instrumentalist who performed in local fife and drum bands before gaining international recognition in the 1980s as a vocalist and guitarist. Her grandfather, Sid Hemphill, was a leading musician in the area, and his daughters, including Jessie Mae's mother Virgie Lee, all played drums and stringed instruments. She is buried at the Senatobia Memorial Cemetery.

Jessie Mae Hemphill, who struck a unique chord with blues fans due to her colorful personality and attire and her choice of instruments, represented deep and rich traditions in the Senatobia area. Her great-grandfather, Dock Hemphill, was a fiddler who was born a slave, and her grandfather, Sid Hemphill (c. 1876-1963), played fiddle, guitar, banjo, drums, fife, mandolin, organ, and quills. Folklorists Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress and Lewis Jones of Fisk University documented Hemphill's broad repertoire at a recording session in Sledge in 1942. Lomax, who recorded music around the world and returned to record Hemphill in 1959, later recalled that encountering Hemphill's fife and drum music was the "main find of my whole career."

Sid Hemphill's daughters, Rosa Lee, Sidney, and Virgie Lee, were all musicians, and when Jessie Mae was a small girl her grandfather inspired her to take up guitar, harmonica, and drums. During the 1950s she sang briefly with bands in Memphis, but most of her early musical experiences were local. Folklorist George Mitchell, who included chapters on her and her aunt Rosa Lee Hill in his book "Blow My Blues Away," recorded her in the late '60s. Her first 45 rpm single, produced by Dr. David Evans, was released on the University of Memphis' High Water label in 1980. Hemphill subsequently toured the U.S. and Europe, recorded several albums, and won several W. C. Handy Awards for traditional blues. She played drums behind fife player Otha Turner on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, and gained broader acclaim via her appearance in the 1992 documentary film "Deep Blues." In 1993 Hemphill suffered a stroke that prevented her from playing guitar, but she continued to sing, and in 2004 she was featured singing and playing tambourine on the album "Dare You to Do It Again," which featured many local musicians.

Other Senatobia area musicians who played in distinctive local folk traditions include many members of the extended family of Otha Turner, including his granddaughter and fife player Sharde Thomas; fife players Napolian Strickland and Ed Young; drummers Lonnie Young, Abe ("Cag" or "Kag") Young and R. L. Boyce; diddley bow players Glen Faulkner and Compton Jones; guitarists Sandy Palmer and Ranie Burnette (who was a major influence on R. L. Burnside); harmonica player Johnny Woods; banjoist Lucius Smith; and vocalist James Shorter, who recorded with Jessie Mae Hemphill. Artists who left the area and performed in more modern styles include guitarist Willie Johnson and bassists Calvin "Fuzz" Jones and Aron Burton, all of whom moved to Chicago; Wordie Perkins, guitarist with the Memphis band the Fieldstones; and Kalamazoo, Michigan, soul/blues vocalist Lou Wilson.

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD

213 West Wiygul Street, Fulton, Mississippi

Jazz bandleader and saxophonist James Melvin “Jimmie” Lunceford was born just outside Fulton on June 6, 1902. He formed his first band, the Chickasaw Syncopators, while teaching at Manassas High School in Memphis in 1927, and by the mid-1930s Lunceford led one of the most popular orchestras in the country. The compelling beat of his blues-influenced music was captured in the band’s slogan, “Rhythm is Our Business.” Lunceford died in Seaside, Oregon, on July 12, 1947.

Jimmie Lunceford led a swing orchestra regarded by many observers as the finest in the land, and no less than Benny Goodman thought that Lunceford’s band was superior to those led by Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Lunceford’s paternal grandparents, Daniel and Gracy Lunceford, arrived in Itawamba County as slaves in the 1840s, shortly after the removal of the Chickasaw Indians. By the 1880s they owned a 320-acre farm, and at the time of James Melvin Lunceford’s birth his parents, James and Ida, owned a 70-acre farm in the Evergreen community; some local residents, though, recall that he was born in the Palmetto community. As an infant Lunceford moved with his family to Oklahoma and later to Denver, where his music teacher was Wilberforce Whiteman, the father of acclaimed jazz bandleader Paul Whiteman.

In 1922 Lunceford began attending Fisk University in Nashville, where he studied sociology and music, excelled in sports, and played in a campus dance band. In 1927 Lunceford began working at Memphis’ Manassas High School as a language instructor and athletic coach, and founded, equipped, and trained the school’s first band, the Chickasaw Syncopators, whose name stemmed from a local neighborhood. Lunceford was very likely the first formal jazz educator, and his work with music programs at Memphis public schools ultimately produced many blues, jazz and soul recording artists. The Chickasaw Syncopators recorded in 1927 and 1930, when they left Memphis to work on the road. Lunceford resumed recording in 1933, and in 1934 his revamped orchestra, featuring arrangements by Melvin “Sy” Oliver, replaced Cab Calloway at Harlem’s prestigious Cotton Club. Although New York remained the band’s base, the “Harlem Express” spent much of their time touring relentlessly across the South.

Lunceford’s many recordings included “Blues in the Groove,” “Muddy Water (A Mississippi Moan),” and “Uptown Blues,” and, although he sold many records, jazz critics claim that his vibrant live performances were never effectively captured on wax. Lunceford’s group was noted for its distinctive two-beat rhythm (Fats Waller called him the “king of syncopation”), as well as its pioneering employment of high-note trumpeters, glee club singers, and highly choreographed stage performances. Lunceford died after eating at an Oregon café where the owner objected to serving African Americans, sparking suggestions that Lunceford and other band members who fell ill were intentionally poisoned. His memorial service in Memphis attracted thousands of fans, and he was buried in the city’s Elmwood Cemetery.

JIMMIE RODGERS AND THE BLUES

Front Street, Singing Brakeman Park, Meridian, Mississippi

Jimmie Rodgers (1897 to 1933) is widely known as the “father of country music,” but blues was a prominent element of his music. The influence of his famous “blue yodels” can be heard in the music of Mississippi blues artists including Howlin’ Wolf, Mississippi John Hurt, Tommy Johnson, and the Mississippi Sheiks. His many songs include the autobiographical “T. B. Blues,” which addressed the tuberculosis that eventually took his life.

Meridian native Jimmie Rodgers was the first major star of country music and introduced the blues to a far wider audience than any other artist of his time, black or white. He was not the first white performer to interpret the blues, but he was the most popular, establishing the blues as a foundation of country music.

More than a third of Rodgers’s recordings were blues, which he encountered as a young man while working as a railway brakeman and traveling musician. In 1927 he recorded the song “Blue Yodel” that sold over a million copies and earned Rodgers the nickname “The Blue Yodeler.” His distinctive style mixed blues, European yodeling, and African American falsetto singing traditions. Before Rodgers, several African Americans, notably Charles Anderson, had specialized in yodeling, and in 1923 blues singers Bessie Smith and Sara Martin recorded Clarence Williams’s song, “Yodeling Blues.”

Although most of Rodgers’s songs were original, some of his most popular were versions of blues classics. “Frankie and Johnnie” was an African American ballad about a murder in St. Louis in 1899, and blues artists including Jim Jackson from Hernando, Mississippi, had made earlier recordings of “In the Jailhouse Now.” Rodgers employed African American musicians in the studio, including Louis Armstrong, who, along with his pianist wife Lil, backed Rodgers on “Blue Yodel No. 9.” Other sessions featured blues guitarist Clifford Gibson and the Louisville Jug Band.

In early 1929 Rodgers toured Mississippi with a vaudeville show that included blues singer Eva Thomas. Bluesmen who claimed to have met, traveled, or performed with Rodgers included Hammie Nixon, Rubin Lacy, and Houston Stackhouse, who recalled that he and Robert Nighthawk accompanied Rodgers in a show at the Edwards Hotel in Jackson (c. 1931). Rodgers’s influence on African American musicians from Mississippi is evident in recordings by the Mississippi Sheiks, Tommy Johnson, Furry Lewis, Scott Dunbar, and Mississippi John Hurt, whose song “Let the Mermaids Flirt With Me” was based on Rodgers’s “Waiting For A Train.” Howlin’ Wolf attributed his distinctive singing style to Rodgers, explaining, “I couldn’t do no yodelin’, so I turned to howlin’. And it’s done me just fine.”

JIMMY REED

Collier Road, Dunleith, Mississippi

Mathis James “Jimmy” Reed, one of the most influential blues artists of the 1950s and ‘60s, was born here on the Shady Dell plantation on September 6, 1925. Reed was one of the first bluesmen to achieve “crossover” success, scoring hits on both the rhythm & blues and pop charts with songs including “Honest I Do,” “Big Boss Man,” “Baby What You Want Me To Do,” and “Bright Lights, Big City.”

Few blues artists have ever developed the widespread appeal with both black and white audiences that Jimmy Reed had. Reed toured the country as a headliner and was a favorite act on Southern college campuses during an era when African Americans could not even attend most of the schools where he played. Reed’s easygoing vocal delivery and basic blues beat were ready-made for singing along and dancing, and most of his songs dealt with the everyday joys and problems of love and romance. Legions of listeners were inspired to take up the guitar or harmonica because Reed made the music sound so effortless.

Reed grew up on John Collier’s Shady Dell plantation and first sang spirituals at Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church in Meltonia. Blues harmonica player Willie Foster was a childhood friend. Reed received little schooling and spent most of his time working the fields here and on the McMurchy plantation near Duncan. During the 1940s he moved to Chicago, served a year in the U. S. Navy, and returned to farming work with his parents in Clarksdale in 1945. Reed began performing in Chicago’s streets, alleys, and nightclubs after he went back to the city and found work at an iron foundry, a steel mill, and the Armour meat packing plant. Reed played guitar and harmonica at the same time, using a wire rack around his neck to hold the harmonica. His unique sound, developed with his longtime partner, guitarist Eddie Taylor, became one of the predominant styles in blues after he began recording for Vee-Jay Records in 1953.

The first of Reed’s nineteen national hit singles was “You Don’t Have to Go” (1955). His success in the mainstream pop music market came years before B. B. King, Muddy Waters, and most other prominent blues artists were recognized outside the African American community. Among the hundreds of artists who have recorded Reed’s songs are Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, Ike & Tina Turner, B.B. King, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix, Neil Young, Count Basie, Sonny James, Conway Twitty, Jerry Lee Lewis, the Everly Brothers, Aretha Franklin, and Bill Cosby.

Reed’s career was sidetracked by epilepsy and alcoholism, and although he recovered sufficiently to begin touring again in the 1970s, health problems persisted. He died on tour in Oakland, California, on August 29, 1976. Reed was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1980 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991. His children, some of whom had sung or played blues with him, embraced gospel music and formed the Seeds of Reed Ministry and a publishing company, Seeds of Reed Music.

JOHN LEE HOOKER

JIMMY ROGERS

200 North Front Street, Ruleville, Mississippi

Born James A. Lane at Dougherty Bayou just west of Ruleville, guitarist and vocalist Jimmy Rogers (1924-1997) played a pioneering role in the post-World War II Chicago blues scene. A member of Muddy Waters' first band in Chicago, Rogers recorded the blues standards "That's All Right," "Chicago Bound," and "Walking By Myself." Ruleville's row of juke joints on Front Street, known locally as "Greasy Street," made the town a longtime center of blues activity.

Jimmy Rogers was a key player in the evolution of electric Chicago blues from its roots in acoustic Delta traditions. Born on June 3, 1924, Rogers—who took the surname of his stepfather—was raised by his grandmother in Vance, where he played in a harmonica quartet together with Snooky Pryor, who also later helped develop the new Chicago blues sound. Rogers took up the guitar in his early teens while living in Charleston and worked his first gigs in Minter City with Little Arthur Johnson. He performed in the Delta with his early idol Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller) and in the Memphis area with Howlin' Wolf and guitarist Joe Willie Wilkins, an important influence. Rogers lived with relatives in Atlanta, Memphis, St. Louis, and South Bend, Indiana, before settling permanently in Chicago in the mid-1940s. There he fell in with leading artists including Memphis Minnie, Tampa Red, Big Bill Broonzy, and John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson (No. 1).

Rogers played for tips on Chicago's Maxwell Street market with other newly arrived Southern musicians including Pryor and harmonica player Little Walter Jacobs. Rogers introduced Jacobs to Muddy Waters, who had arrived in Chicago in 1943, and the three were soon performing together. Known informally as the "Headhunters," the group developed a new and powerful ensemble sound that wasn't fully captured on Waters' recordings until the early '50s. Rogers made his first solo recording in 1946 for the Harlem label, but it was mistakenly credited to Memphis Slim. The first single to appear under his name came out on Chess in 1950. Rogers cut a dozen singles for Chess, and while only the 1957 release "Walking By Myself" reached the charts, others including "Ludella," "Sloppy Drunk," and, most notably, "That's All Right" became oft-covered blues standards.

Rogers continued to play and record with Waters in the '50s but also led his own band at times. He appeared as a sideman on recordings by Little Walter, Memphis Minnie, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Sunnyland Slim, Floyd Jones, Johnny Shines, T-Bone Walker, Howlin' Wolf, and others. After playing for about a year in Wolf's band, Rogers retired from music for eight years and ran a clothing store and taxi business. He returned to performing in 1969, and remained active as a performer and recording artist until his death on December 19, 1997. Rogers' influence on popular music was confirmed by the guests on his final album, *Blues, Blues Blues*, including Eric Clapton, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger, Robert Plant, Jimmy Page, Stephen Stills, and Taj Mahal. Rogers was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1995. Other Ruleville-born blues artists who moved to Chicago include vocalist Jeanne Carroll and bassist Hayes Ware.

JOHN LEE HOOKER

Highway 3 at King Street, Vance, Mississippi

John Lee Hooker, circa 1917-2001, one of the most famous and successful of all blues singers, had his musical roots here in the Delta, where he learned to play guitar in the style of his stepfather, Will Moore. Hooker spent many of his early years with his family in the cottonfields around Vance and Lambert before he moved to Detroit in the 1940s. He became an international celebrity after recording hits such as “Boogie Chillen,” “I’m in the Mood,” and “Boom Boom.”

John Lee Hooker was at once one of the most influential yet inimitable artists in blues history. His distinctive “boogie” style harked back to the early days of blues, but his mixture of down-home sounds and urban sensibilities resounded with many southerners who, like him, migrated north seeking work and a better life. Hooker, one of eleven children, often gave vague and contradictory details about his early life, later professing little desire to return to Mississippi. He often cited August 22, 1917, as his birth date, although census records, showing the family near Tutwiler in 1920 and 1930, indicate he was several years older. He said he born between Clarksdale and Vance; Social Security files list his birthplace as Glendora. His father, William Hooker, at one time a sharecropper on the Fewell plantation near Vance, was a preacher who frowned upon the blues. John Lee preferred living with his stepfather, blues guitarist Will Moore, and claimed that his idiosyncratic style was “identical” to Moore’s. Hooker was also influenced by his sister Alice’s boyfriend, Tony Hollins (1910-c.1959), who gave Hooker his first guitar. Hooker’s song “When My First Wife Left Me” was based on a 1941 Hollins recording. Hollins once lived north of Vance in Longstreet, so named for its long street of stores, houses, and dance halls.

Following stays in Memphis and Cincinnati and returns to the Vance/Lambert area, Hooker settled in Detroit, where he made his first recordings in 1948. In 1949 his single “Boogie Chillen” reached No. 1 on the R&B charts; “I’m in the Mood” achieved the same feat in 1951. Hooker, famed for his ability to improvise new songs in the studio, recorded prolifically for many different labels, often under pseudonyms to avoid contractual problems. He later crossed over to rock ‘n’ roll and folk audiences, and enjoyed a remarkable resurgence beginning in 1989 with the release of *The Healer*, one of several Hooker albums that featured collaborations with leading rock artists. Hooker received four Grammy® Awards, a Rhythm & Blues Foundation Pioneer Award, and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (as well as the one in Clarksdale). He was inducted into both the Rock and Roll and Blues Halls of Fame. Hooker moved to California in the late 1960s and later owned a club, the Boom Boom Room, in San Francisco. He died at his home in Los Altos on June 21, 2001. Hooker’s cousin Earl Hooker (1929-1970), who also hailed from the Vance area, was widely regarded by his peers as the best guitarist in the blues. A versatile and innovative performer, Hooker was especially celebrated for his slide guitar skills. As a teenager Hooker performed on the King Biscuit Time radio show in Helena, and later played and recorded with Ike Turner, Junior Wells, and many others, including his own Chicago-based group, the Roadmasters.

JOHNNY WINTER

302 North Broad Street, Leland, Mississippi

Guitar icon Johnny Winter's emergence on the national music scene in 1969 created a sensation among rock and blues audiences. The first of his many hit albums for Columbia Records featured the song "Leland, Mississippi Blues," which paid tribute to his roots here. Winter's grandfather and father, a former mayor of Leland, operated a cotton business, J. D. Winter & Son, at this site. Winter was born in Texas in 1944 but spent parts of his childhood in Leland.

Johnny Winter and his younger brother Edgar were born into a prominent Leland family that was famed not only for its social, civic, and business leadership but also for its musical talent. Their father, Leland native John Dawson Winter, Jr. (1909-2001), played saxophone and guitar and sang at churches, weddings, Kiwanis and Rotary Club gatherings, and other events, including barbershop singing contests as a member of the Lamppost Quartet and front porch concerts with the Winters' five-piece family band at the Winter home. His repertoire included pop songs such as "Ain't She Sweet" and "Bye Bye Blackbird," along with comedy routines. Winter, Jr., who worked with his father, John D. Winter, Sr. (1879-1938), as a cotton classer, and later ran the family's cotton brokerage firm, was elected mayor of Leland in 1936 and served until leaving for military service in 1941. John Dawson "Johnny" Winter III was born on February 23, 1944, while his father was away in the army. Although the family resided in Leland, his mother Edwina chose to go to her home town of Beaumont, Texas, for the birth of Johnny, as well as of Edgar on December 28, 1946. The Winters then permanently moved to Beaumont.

With encouragement from their parents, the Winter brothers, both albinos, began performing as youngsters and were already recording while still in their teens, playing rock 'n' roll, blues, and R&B. Despite his early childhood here in the heartland of Delta blues, Johnny only discovered the blues in Texas, listening to the radio in the kitchen with the Winters' African American maid. Mississippi-born bluesmen Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, B. B. King, and Robert Johnson became his favorite blues artists, along with Bobby Bland from Tennessee, and Winter developed a fiery electric synthesis of rock and blues that began to attract national attention in the late 1960s.

The self-titled 1969 album Johnny Winter, which featured guest appearances by Mississippi natives Willie Dixon and Big Walter Horton, established Winter as a premier figure in high-energy blues-rock circles. He went on to record several more albums for Columbia Records, all of which appeared on the national charts. Multi-instrumentalist Edgar Winter played on his brother's Second Winter LP and began recording with his own groups, scoring 1970s pop hits with the singles "Frankenstein" and "Free Ride." In later years Johnny Winter produced albums by his idol, Muddy Waters, and recorded in the company of the Muddy Waters band, James Cotton, John Lee Hooker, and other Mississippians. In 1988, after recording three albums for the blues label Alligator Records in Chicago, he became the first white musician elected to the Blues Hall of Fame.

JONES COUNTY BLUES

230 Maple Street, Laurel, Mississippi

The Laurel area, a hub of musical activity in southeast Mississippi, has been home to a number of noted blues performers, including harmonica player Sam Myers, singer Albennie Jones, and guitarist Blind Roosevelt Graves. R&B, blues, and rock 'n' roll producer Johnny Vincent, who founded Ace Records in Jackson in 1955, got his start selling records in Laurel. One of Mississippi's most popular blues events, the Laurel Mother's Day Blues Festival, began its long run here in 1987.

Laurel and Jones County performers have traveled far and wide to sing the blues, while local nightclubs and festivals have continued to celebrate the blues here at home. One of the first local musicians to record was guitarist Blind Roosevelt Graves (1909-1962) from Summerland. He and his tambourine-playing brother, Uaroy (also called Aaron), recorded in 1929 for Paramount Records and in 1936 for A.R.C. They often performed for tips on the streets of Laurel. The Nelson brothers Elijah ("Professor"), a trombonist, band director, and music teacher, and Romie, who played cornet and other instruments, were noted minstrel show performers who lived in Laurel. Elijah and another brother, tuba player Lamar "Buck" Nelson, began traveling with shows prior to World War I, sometimes joined by clarinetist Arnett Nelson (c. 1890-1959) from Ellisville. Arnett played alto saxophone on many blues and jazz records in Chicago in the 1930s, as did Laurel native Andrew "Goon" Gardner (1916-1975) in the 1940s and '50s.

Sam Myers (1936-2006) performed for years in Jackson with Elmore James and others, and made his first record there in 1957 for John Vincent Imbragulo's Ace label. Imbragulo, aka Johnny Vincent (1925-2000), started out selling used 78s from the jukebox of his parents' Laurel restaurant. Myers later toured widely with Anson Funderburgh & the Rockets from Dallas. Eastabuchie native Leo "Lucky Lopez" Evans (1937-2004), who played guitar with Myers and others in Mississippi, moved to Milwaukee and later recorded several albums in England. Albennie Jones (1914-1989), from Errata, sang in church in Gulfport before she launched a blues career in New York in the 1930s. On some of her 1940s records she was accompanied by jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie. Another Jones Countian, Roland "Boy Blue" Hayes (c. 1922-1980), son of local musician Doc Hayes, moved to Arkansas, where he recorded as a singer and harmonicist for folklorist Alan Lomax in 1959.

A stalwart on the local blues scene for over sixty years, Ellisville native Tommie "T-Bone" Pruitt (b. 1933), led the Rhythm Rockers band and played guitar with Bo Diddley, the Rhythm Aces, the Five Royales, and others. Harmonica player Lee "Tennessee" Crisp (1912-1993), who performed locally with Pruitt in the 1970s and '80s, once toured Europe with the Mississippi Delta Blues Band. He was a protégé of Tennessee bluesman Sleepy John Estes. Jasper County native L. C. Ulmer (b. 1928), a multi-instrumentalist, performed across the country for decades, often as a one-man band, before settling in Ellisville in 2002. He began a belated recording career after his return to Mississippi. Venues for blues in Laurel have included the Cotton Bowl, Paradise, Top Hat, Blade's, Playhouse, Skylark, Elks Club, American Legion, Civic Center, and Navy Yard dance hall.

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY

440 North Railroad Avenue, Brookhaven, Mississippi

Little Brother Montgomery (1906-1985), a major presence on south Mississippi's blues and jazz scene during much of the pre-World War II era, was famed for his trembling vocals and masterful piano playing. The Montgomery family, including his brothers Joe and Tollie, also pianists, once lived in Norfield, a sawmill town thirteen miles south of Brookhaven. Montgomery was popular at sawmills and lumber camps, and played cafes and dances in Vicksburg, Jackson, Brookhaven, McComb, and other towns.

Little Brother Montgomery is often associated with his native Kentwood, Louisiana, or with Chicago, where he spent the majority of his long career, but he was also once the most prominent blues pianist in Mississippi. He inspired a young Willie Dixon in Vicksburg, mentored Otis Spann and Little Johnnie Jones in Jackson, and influenced Skip James, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, Sunnyland Slim, and many others. Born Eurreal Wilford Montgomery on April 18, 1906 (or possibly a year or two later according to some documents), he took to piano as a child. His parents and siblings all played music and his father, Harper Montgomery, ran a juke joint where pianists entertained local lumber workers. Montgomery said he left home at age eleven to play piano on the road, but he continued to use the family home as a base during his travels. In the 1920s the family relocated to Norfield, where Harper Montgomery worked for the Denkmann Lumber Company. His daughter Aris, whose son Paul Gayten became a renowned New Orleans pianist and producer, also moved with her husband to Norfield. Sawmills often stayed in a location only until the surrounding timber supply was exhausted, then moved to a forested area to resume operations. In 1931 Denkmann abandoned Norfield and reassembled its machinery in Canton; the Montgomerys and many other workers' families followed.

Sawmill communities and lumber, turpentine, and levee camps provided employment for many blues musicians, including Little Brother Montgomery. But he also performed at nightspots during stays in Vicksburg, Canton, Gulfport, and New Orleans, traveled with dance bands, and tried living in Chicago for a few years. Montgomery recorded his signature tune, "Vicksburg Blues," in 1930. Returning to Mississippi in 1931, he led his own Jackson-based Southland Troubadors, sometimes broadcasting on local stations such as WCOC in Meridian, to advertise the band's appearances. The group, which also toured several states billed as the Collegiate Ramblers, never recorded, but as a solo pianist or with only one accompanist, Montgomery cut twenty-two blues sides, all released on singles on the Bluebird label, in 1935-36.

Montgomery, hailed in *Down Beat* magazine in 1940 as "the greatest piano man that ever invaded Dixie," spent time in Yazoo City, Hattiesburg, and Beaumont, Texas, before permanently settling in Chicago in 1942. There, as in Mississippi, he became a respected figure, dividing his time between performing with bands and as a solo blues artist. He was a key participant in the city's traditional jazz scene as well as a standard-bearer of blues piano. Montgomery accompanied Memphis Minnie, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, and others on recording sessions as well as cutting numerous albums of his own in the U.S., Europe, and Japan until his death on September 6, 1985.

LITTLE JUNIOR PARKER

Bobo-New Africa Road, Bobo, Mississippi

Little Junior Parker, one of the most outstanding blues singers of the 1950s and '60s, was born on a plantation near Bobo on March 27, 1932. As a youngster Parker moved with his mother to West Memphis, and he recorded his first hit, "Feelin' Good," for Sun Records in Memphis in 1953. His many later hits included "Driving Wheel," "Next Time You See Me," "In the Dark," and "Sweet Home Chicago." Parker died in Blue Island, Illinois, on November 18, 1971.

Junior Parker once ranked with B. B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, and Little Milton as top blues stars of the African American "chitlin circuit." He also had many white admirers, including Elvis Presley, who recorded Parker's "Mystery Train" for Sun Records. Parker's singing resonated with warmth and elegance, and he played harmonica in a similarly mellow style. He began singing at the Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Bobo and spent much of his childhood at his grandfather's twelve-room house here. His main influence on harmonica was Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller), whose "King Biscuit Time" radio broadcasts from Helena, Arkansas, could be heard in Bobo. After Parker moved to West Memphis at age twelve, he worked with Williamson and Howlin' Wolf, as well as with a circle of young performers including Bobby Bland, Johnny Ace, brothers Matt and Floyd Murphy, Pat Hare, and Earl Forest. Parker made his first records for the Modern and Sun labels but enjoyed his greatest success during his 1953-1966 stint with Duke Records and its associated Buffalo Booking Agency in Houston, Texas. Parker toured the country with Bland serving as his valet at first and later assuming a co-starring role in a "Blues Consolidated" package show. With the profits from his records and tours Parker was able to buy homes in Houston and later in Chicago. During his final years he continued to produce hits, the last of which, "Drowning on Dry Land" on the Capitol label, made the charts in 1971, the same year he died of a brain tumor at the age of 39. He always used Herman Parker, Jr., as his legal name, but on his Mississippi birth certificate his name is entered as Herbert Parker. He was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 2001.

Bobo has also been home to blues artists Joe Willie Wilkins, Joe Cole, and C. V. Veal. Many performers, most notably Robert "Bilbo" Walker, have also played at various country stores once located in Bobo. Wilkins (1923-1979) was born in nearby Davenport but raised here. One of the most highly regarded of the early electric guitarists in the Delta, with admirers including B. B. King, Muddy Waters, and Little Milton, Wilkins spent most of his career as a sideman and was best known for his work with Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2. As a teenager living in Bobo, he played with a group of older bluesmen including guitarists Frank Wilkins (his father) and Bob Williams, fiddler Sam Harris, and accordionist Walter "Pat" Rhodes, who was one of the first Delta blues artists to record (for Columbia in 1927). Alabama-born guitarist Joe Cole (1921-2005) moved to Bobo in 1953 and worked here as a tractor mechanic. He often played country jukes in the area and was renowned for one song in particular, "Feather Bed." C. V. Veal, a longtime fixture on the Clarksdale music scene as a drummer, emcee, and blues and gospel singer, was born in Bobo on October 4, 1926. He recalled that Junior Parker would entertain locals as a youngster here.

LITTLE MILTON CAMPBELL

McGinnis Park, East Grand Avenue, Inverness, Mississippi

Little Milton Campbell, one of the world's leading performers of blues and soul music for several decades, was born on the George Bowles plantation about two miles southwest of this site on September 7, 1933. Acclaimed as both a singer and guitarist, Campbell was a longtime crowd favorite at Mississippi festivals and nightclubs. His hits included "We're Gonna Make It," "The Blues Is Alright," and "That's What Love Will Make You Do." He died in Memphis on August 4, 2005.

There was nothing "little" in stature or physique about Milton Campbell, whose nickname served only to distinguish him from his father, "Big" Milton Campbell. As a vocalist Campbell was equally effective with powerful anthems and soft ballads, and as a guitarist he had few peers. He was also a savvy businessman who demanded professionalism from his bands and insisted on maintaining a consistent musical identity throughout his long career. Campbell produced many of his own records and booked other artists through Camil Productions, a company he ran with his wife, Pat.

Campbell was born near Inverness but spent most of his early childhood with his mother in Magenta in Washington County. He built a one-stringed guitar on the side of his home and around age twelve he bought his first real guitar via mail order with money he had made by working in the cotton fields. He returned sometimes to stay with his father in Inverness and later performed at the town's top blues venue, the Harlem Club, owned by Wallace Bowles (brother of plantation owner George Bowles, Jr.). Milton, however, always cited Leland blues bandleader Eddie Cusic as the first to give him experience playing for audiences. By his late teens Milton had moved to Greenville, where he performed with local luminaries including Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Joe Willie Wilkins, and Willie Love. He also hosted a radio program there on WGVM.

Campbell first recorded in Jackson as a sideman with Love in 1951. In 1953 talent scout Ike Turner helped Campbell land a recording contract with Sun Records in Memphis. Milton started to develop his own distinctive style after relocating in the mid-'50s to East St. Louis and later to Chicago. In St. Louis he recorded for Bobbin Records and also recruited talent for the label, including then little-known Albert King. Campbell moved on to Chicago's Checker label, where he began to blend his blues with soul music and rose to national prominence with a long string of hits. In 1971 Campbell signed with the Memphis soul label Stax, where he scored further hits, and in 1984 he joined the Jackson-based Malaco label for a long and productive association that resulted in fourteen albums. He moved to Las Vegas, though he kept an apartment in Memphis in order to be closer to the Southern soul and blues performing circuit where he remained a major attraction. During his career Little Milton had a total of twenty-nine singles and seventeen albums on the Billboard magazine charts. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1988. Campbell suffered a stroke on July 27, 2005, and died a week later.

LIVIN' AT LULA

Front Street at 2nd Street, Lula, Mississippi

The Lula area has been home to legendary Mississippi blues performers Charley Patton, Son House, Frank Frost, and Sam Carr. Patton immortalized Lula in the lyrics of his recordings “Dry Well Blues” (1930) and “Stone Pony Blues” (1934). His wife Bertha Lee also sang of “livin’ at Lula town” in her 1934 record, “Mind Reader Blues.” Frost lived in Lula in the 1960s and ‘70s and performed with Carr and Big Jack Johnson in the Delta’s most renowned juke joint band, the Jelly Roll Kings.

Lula was an important center of blues activity in 1930, when two of Mississippi’s premier blues performers, Charley Patton (circa 1891 to 1934) and Son House (1902 to 1988), met here. Patton was living with Lula vocalist Bertha Lee Pate (1902 to 1975) when House arrived in town. Patton, House, guitarist Willie Brown, singer-pianist Louise Johnson, and a spiritual group, the Delta Big Four, traveled together from Lula to Grafton, Wisconsin, to record for the Paramount label in 1930. Among the songs they recorded, Patton’s “Dry Well Blues” and House’s “Dry Spell Blues” both addressed the severe drought that struck the Delta that year. Patton’s song dealt specifically with the problems the drought had wrought upon the citizenry of Lula. Bertha Lee and Patton did not record together until 1934, after they had moved to Holly Ridge.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, another group of musicians brought new energy to the Lula blues scene. Billed under various names, including Frank Frost and the Nighthawks, the Jelly Roll Kings, and the Little Sam Carr Rhythm & Blues Revue, the band featured Frank Frost (1936 to 1999) on harmonica, guitar or organ, Sam Carr (born 1926) on drums, and Big Jack Johnson (born 1940) from Clarksdale on guitar. Arthur Williams (born 1937) from Tunica also played harmonica with the group for several years. Frost lived in Lula, where he once worked as a janitor at the elementary school, while Carr drove a tractor and Johnson drove an oil delivery truck. One of their performance bases was Joe’s Place, a juke joint operated by Joe Foy in Lula; another was Conway’s, a roadhouse run by country singer Conway Twitty’s parents on Moon Lake. The band’s first manager, who secured them recording opportunities with the Phillips International and Jewel labels in the 1960s, was Lula service station owner Lee Bass. Together or individually, Frost, Carr, and Johnson toured internationally and recorded a number of albums. Frost appeared in the 1986 Hollywood film *Crossroads*.

Many of the Lula area blues and gospel performers have lived on nearby plantations such as those owned by the Jeffries, Powell, and Mohead families. In 1942 singers Roxie Threadgill and Mary Johnson recorded for a Fisk University-Library of Congress project on the Mohead plantation, known as Texas Island. Owner Guy Mohead’s grandson, John Mohead, became a Southern rock singer-songwriter who named his first CD *Lula City Limits*. Another local musical site, Lady Luck Rhythm and Blues Casino, selected blues as a theme for its entertainment and décor when it opened in 1994. The casino, which later became the Isle of Capri, has sponsored both the Sunflower River Blues & Gospel Festival in Clarksdale and the Arkansas Blues & Heritage Festival in Helena.

MAGIC SAM

Holmes Drive, Grenada, Mississippi

Magic Sam (Samuel Maghett) was one of the most dynamic and gifted blues musicians during his short lifetime (1937 to 1969). Born a few miles northeast of this site, Maghett began his performing career in Grenada and lived in this house until he moved to Chicago in the early 1950s. The youthful energy and spirit of Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, and Freddie King modernized Chicago blues into an explosive, electrifying new style in the late 1950s and early '60s.

Magic Sam, unlike most of his blues contemporaries, was born and raised in a community where fiddle music, hoedowns and square dances held sway over the blues among the African American population. Roy Moses, a renowned black fiddler in Grenada County, was not only the leading caller of steps at such dances, but also a mentor and inspiration to younger local musicians. Samuel Maghett carried these musical influences with him to Chicago in 1950. Blues guitarist Syl Johnson, who later became a nationally known soul singer, recalled that Sam was playing “a hillbilly style” at the time, and Johnson began teaching him blues and boogies. Sam developed a house-rocking blues style unparalleled in its rhythmic drive; it may well have had roots in the dance tempos of the reels and breakdowns he learned in Grenada.

Magic Sam was better known, however, for the heartfelt vocals and stinging guitar work of his 1957 to 58 blues recordings produced by Willie Dixon for the Cobra label in Chicago such as “All Your Love” and “Easy Baby,” some of which featured another Grenada native, Billy Stepney, on drums. Sam’s singing reflected another early influence, that of the church. During the ‘50s he often returned to visit and perform in Grenada, where he was credited with helping to popularize the blues. Sam and his combo won a local talent contest at the Union Theater which enabled them to compete on a show in Memphis promoted by WDIA radio. After performing under several stage names, he settled on “Magic” Sam—to rhyme with his surname.

In Chicago, Sam was at the vanguard of a new West Side blues movement. He remained a popular nightclub act during the 1960s and was poised to take his career to a new level, after recording two acclaimed albums for Delmark Records and turning in legendary festival performances in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and in Europe, but he died of a heart attack on December 1, 1969. His music has continued to influence generations of blues, R&B, and rock musicians.

Magic Sam’s birthplace now lies submerged beneath Grenada Lake. The Redgrass and Hendersonville communities where he spent his earliest years, along with the former town of Graysport, were flooded in the late 1940s to create the lake as a flood control reservoir. The Maghett family relocated here to the Knoxville community, where Sam resided until he was thirteen. Maggitt Street, just south of this site, represents one of many local variations of the family surname.

MAGIC SLIM

816 Union Street, Grenada, Mississippi

Morris "Magic Slim" Holt, who developed a raw, hard-hitting guitar style that made him a favorite on the international blues club and festival circuit from the late 1970s well into the twenty-first century, was born in Torrance on August 7, 1937. His Chicago-based band, the Teardrops, at one time included his brothers Nick Holt on bass and Douglas "Lee Baby" Holt on drums. Holt's stage name was taken from a childhood friend from Grenada, Blues Hall of Fame guitarist Magic Sam.

Magic Slim and his namesake Magic Sam each created a deep and instantly identifiable approach to the blues, and although their styles differed, both guitarists shared similar influences from their early days in Grenada. They both sang in church and learned to play country music, which was more prevalent than blues on the radio in the 1940s, and both shared a fascination for John Lee Hooker's 1949 blues hit "Boogie Chillen." Slim and Sam were also both born in areas that are now submerged beneath Grenada Lake. Magic Slim was born on a farm in Torrance, a former sawmill town in Yalobusha County, and moved to Grenada with his family when he was about eleven. The Holt family lived at 814 Union Street, and Slim's mother ran a cafe down the street.

Magic Slim's first instrument was a church piano, but he and his brother Nick Holt also played a homemade one-string guitar fashioned from a wire nailed to the wall between two bottles. Slim learned some guitar from his uncle, Walter Miller, who played "Roll and Tumble Blues," and sometimes sat beneath the trees playing guitar alongside his friend Sam Maghett. After Maghett assumed the name Magic Sam (to rhyme with his surname) in Chicago, he bestowed the name Magic Slim upon Morris Holt. In Grenada, Magic Slim was also inspired by performances he saw in the 1950s by Rufus Thomas, Willie Mabon, and particularly by the guitarists who played in Slim Harpo's band. Magic Slim had tried his hand in Chicago in 1955 but found his skills weren't up to par for the city's competitive blues scene. He returned to Grenada and taught his brothers Nick (1940-2009) and Douglas "Lee Baby" (1944-2006), performing with them during the early 1960s in Grenada, Charleston, Minter City, and other Delta towns at juke joints that often charged twenty-five cents at the door while he helped his stepfather haul and sell wood and homebrewed whiskey.

After returning to Chicago around 1965 with new confidence and control of his instrument, Slim played with Robert "Mr. Pitiful" Perkins & the Teardrops, and took over the band after Perkins left, recording with them for the local Ja-Wes label. His act continued to grow more powerful and exciting until, by the 1980s, Magic Slim & the Teardrops were widely regarded, at home and abroad, as the quintessential Chicago blues band. Their trademark sound was based on Slim's ability to turn almost any song into a churning blues shuffle driven by stinging guitar licks. With

a repertoire of hundreds of songs, he was able to record dozens of albums beginning in 1976. He began touring Europe in 1978 and simultaneously developed a fanatical following in Lincoln, Nebraska, a college town that proved so receptive that Slim later moved there with his family when they tired of ghetto life in Chicago. Magic Slim won his first W.C. Handy (Blues Music) Award in 1981 and was nominated more than forty times during the first three decades of the awards.

MALACO RECORDS

3023 West Northside Drive, Jackson, Mississippi

Malaco Records, one of America's foremost labels in the fields of southern soul, blues, and gospel, was founded at this site in 1967. Malaco's studio was the first state-of-the-art recording facility in Mississippi. The label attained national stature with the success of Dorothy Moore's "Misty Blue" (1976), Z.Z. Hill's "Down Home Blues" (1982), and other records by the Jackson Southernaires, Denise LaSalle, Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Latimore, and Johnnie Taylor.

Malaco Records released its first record, a 45 rpm soul single by Cozy Corley from Hattiesburg, in 1968. By then the company had already been in business for several years as a booking agency, Malaco Attractions, founded by Tommy Couch and Mitch Malouf. Couch and fraternity brother Gerald "Wolf" Stephenson had booked bands as college students at Ole Miss in the early and mid-1960s, and after Stephenson joined the Malaco team, he became chief engineer at the studio which Malaco built at this site in 1967. Malouf left the business in 1975, but Couch continued with Stephenson and, later, Stewart Madison as partners.

During the 1960s and '70s, Malaco often worked with larger companies such as Capitol, ABC, Mercury, Atlantic, Stax, and T.K. to release and distribute the recordings produced here. Malaco specialized in rhythm & blues or soul music, although more traditional blues was occasionally recorded here, most notably the 1969 Mississippi Fred McDowell album *I Do Not Play No Rock 'n' Roll*. Among the '70s R&B hits produced at Malaco were "Groove Me" by King Floyd on Malaco's subsidiary label, Chimneyville; "Mr. Big Stuff" by Jean Knight on Stax Records; and the first Top Ten hit on Malaco Records, "Misty Blue" by Jackson singer Dorothy Moore. But it was the album *Down Home* by Z. Z. Hill that established Malaco's reputation in the blues. The LP stayed on the Billboard rhythm & blues charts for a phenomenal 93 weeks in 1982-83 while selling half a million copies, an unprecedented mark for a blues LP. Its success proved that there was still a substantial audience for the blues, and its production style set a standard for much of the music that followed.

Utilizing top-notch songwriters (George Jackson in particular) and skilled arrangers and studio musicians, Malaco blended elements of blues and soul music on further albums by Hill and other singers who joined the Malaco stable, including Denise LaSalle, Latimore, Little Milton, Bobby Bland, Johnnie Taylor, Shirley Brown, Tyrone Davis, Floyd Taylor, and Marvin Sease. Groups such as the Jackson Southernaires, the Williams Brothers, and the Mississippi Mass Choir earned Malaco renown as one of the country's top gospel labels as well. Other blues and southern soul artists, including Mel Waiters, Bobby Rush, Artie "Blues Boy" White, and Poonanny, recorded for Waldoxy, a label launched by Tommy Couch, Jr., in 1992. Many Malaco hits, including "Down Home Blues," "The Blues is Alright," "Someone Else is Steppin' In," "Members Only," and "Last Two Dollars," have become staples in the repertoires of blues bands across the country.

MARCUS BOTTOM

Halls Ferry Road and Bowmar Avenue, Vicksburg, Mississippi

The historic African American community of Marcus Bottom was an important center of early blues, jazz, and gospel music activity. Pianist Eurreal “Little Brother” Montgomery, one of the premier blues artists of the 1920s and ‘30s, performed here and in other areas of Vicksburg. His song “Vicksburg Blues” became a blues standard and has been recorded by many other performers. Famed blues composer Willie Dixon, a Vicksburg native, was particularly inspired by Montgomery’s music.

Vicksburg was uniquely positioned to play an important role in blues and jazz history. A lively river port midway between New Orleans and Memphis, Vicksburg was not only the most populous city in Mississippi in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but also home to the state’s largest African American community. A wide range of musical traditions mingled here as professional traveling bands, itinerant guitarists from Delta cotton plantations, barrelhouse piano players, and others worked the clubs and cafes in Marcus Bottom and in areas of town closer to the river. Vicksburg was at one time a base for Delta blues pioneer Charley Patton, fellow guitarists Bo Carter and Honeyboy Edwards, and a plethora of pianists led by Little Brother Montgomery, along with many noted early musicians who were born here, including Willie Dixon, Milt Hinton, Johnny Young, Walter Barnes, and Thomas Pinkston.

In the 1920s Little Brother Montgomery (c. 1906-1985) performed at the South Side Park Dance Hall, just east of Halls Ferry Road on Lane Street, as well as at Zach Lewis’s and Bell’s Café, both on Washington Street. Montgomery’s music left a strong impression on the young Willie Dixon, and when Dixon became a powerful figure on the Chicago blues scene decades later, he hired Montgomery for recording sessions and club dates. Among the pianists Montgomery recalled playing in Vicksburg were Earnest “44” Johnson, also known as “Flunky,” Sam “Cracking Kid” Johnson, Tommy Jackson, Walter Lewis, and a pair who were skilled musicians despite their impairments: Nub-Fingered Son Cook and Stiff Arm Eddie Scott.

Jazz legends Earl “Fatha” Hines, King Oliver, Bennie Moten, and Louis Armstrong also played at the South Side Park Dance Hall, according to music historian Earnest McBride, who lived near the club. While the Blue Room and the Cotton Club elsewhere in town later booked the big name acts, the musical tradition continued in Marcus Bottom with local performers (including Willie Johnson, Billy Jones, and Leon Dixon) or blues on the jukeboxes at the Playboy Club, the El Morocco, Delia’s Do Drop Inn, the Open House, Big Will’s, the Red Dot Inn, and the Melody Lounge. Various members of Vicksburg’s popular Red Tops band, including trumpeter Willard Tyler, grew up nearby. In 1954 folklorist Frederic Ramsey, Jr., came to Marcus Bottom in search of traditional African American music and recorded string band musicians Tom Johnson and John Copeland for a Folkways Records series called Music of the South. Former resident C. K. Chiplin chronicled the local community before and during the civil rights era in his 1996 book *Roads From the Bottom: A Survival Journal for America’s Black Community*.

MEMPHIS MINNIE

7564 Norfolk Road, Walls, Mississippi

Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas, 1897 to 1973) was one of the premier blues artists of the 1930s and '40s. Her singing and songwriting, spirited demeanor, and superlative guitar playing propelled her to the upper echelons of a field then dominated by male guitarists and pianists. In the early 1900s Minnie lived in Tunica and DeSoto counties, where she began performing with guitarist Willie Brown and others. She is buried here in the New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery.

Minnie spent most of her childhood in Mississippi, where she was known as "Kid" Douglas. U.S. Census listings of 1900 and 1910 place her in Tunica County, but she gave her birthplace as Algiers, Louisiana (June 3, 1897). When she was a teenager, her family moved to Walls, but Minnie soon struck out on her own, inspired to make a living with her voice and guitar. She reportedly joined the Ringling Brothers circus as a traveling musician, and performed locally at house parties and dances with Willie Brown, Willie Moore, and other bluesmen around Lake Cormorant and Walls.

The lure of Beale Street drew her to Memphis, where she worked the streets, cafes, clubs, and parties. She began performing with Joe McCoy, whom she married in 1929. After a talent scout heard the duo performing for tips in a barbershop, they made their first recordings that year, billed as "Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie." "Bumble Bee" was their big hit, and has been recorded by many other blues singers, although in later years their most recognized song would become "When the Levee Breaks." The couple soon relocated to Chicago and continued to perform and record together before Minnie took on a new guitar-playing husband, Ernest Lawlars (or Lawlers), a.k.a. "Little Son Joe." Minnie recorded prolifically throughout the 1930s and '40s, scoring hits such as "Me and My Chauffeur Blues," "Please Set a Date," "In My Girlish Days," and "Nothing in Rambling." Her showmanship and instrumental prowess enabled her to defeat the top bluesmen of Chicago, including Muddy Waters and Big Bill Broonzy, in blues contests. Minnie gained a reputation as a down-home diva who could handle herself, and her men, both on and off the stage. In 1958 Minnie returned to Memphis, where she died in a nursing home on August 6, 1973.

One of the rare women of her era to gain prominence as a guitarist, Minnie overcame considerable odds to achieve success, battling both racism and sexism. She has been heralded as a champion of feminist independence and empowerment. She was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in its first year of balloting (1980). The Mt. Zion Memorial Fund erected a headstone for her here in 1996. Her songs have been recorded by women such as Big Mama Thornton, Lucinda Williams, and Muria Muldaur, as well as by men, including Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and Western swing pioneer Milton Brown.

MISSISSIPPI FRED MCDOWELL
204 Main Street, Como, Mississippi

McDowell, a seminal figure in Mississippi hill country blues, was one of the most vibrant performers of the 1960s blues revival. McDowell (circa 1906 to 1972) was a sharecropper and local entertainer in 1959 when he made his first recordings at his home on a farm north of Como for noted folklorist Alan Lomax. The depth and originality of McDowell's music brought him such worldwide acclaim that he was able to record and tour prolifically during his final years.

"Mississippi" Fred McDowell, as he was usually billed, was actually born and raised in Rossville, Tennessee. He never knew his birth date, January 12, 1904 is often cited, although census and Social Security documents point to 1906 or 1907. His music blended the sounds he heard from local guitarists in Tennessee with the pulsating juke joint grooves of the North Mississippi hills and the hard-edged blues he picked up during several years spent in the Delta. Spirituals were an important part of his repertoire, and one, "You Got to Move," recorded by McDowell in 1965, gained widespread fame when the Rolling Stones recorded it on their 1971 album *Sticky Fingers*.

McDowell, who learned to fret his guitar strings with a bottleneck or metal slide after seeing his father's cousin play with a steak bone, honed his skills under the tutelage of longtime friend and neighbor Eli Green, who was said to possess magical powers. Green's song "Write Me a Few Lines" became a McDowell signature piece and was later recorded by one of McDowell's biggest admirers, Bonnie Raitt. McDowell was also so well known for the rhythmic tour-de-force "Shake 'Em On Down" that he earned the nickname "Shake 'Em." His music laid the groundwork for generations of hill country musicians to come, most notably R. L. Burnside, who started out by playing McDowell's guitar at a house party. Alan Lomax described McDowell as "a bluesman quite the equal of Son House and Muddy Waters, but, musically speaking, their granddaddy."

The highly acclaimed albums that McDowell waxed during his belated recording career (1959 to 1971) proved that some of the greatest country blues music had gone undiscovered by the record companies that scoured the South for talent in the 1920s and '30s. McDowell found himself in demand at folk and blues clubs and festivals, yet kept a job pumping gas at the Stuckey's candy store and service station on Interstate 55 during his final years, even when he was at last able to support himself as a musician. Stuckey's became his social hangout and his office, where he would receive phone calls from booking agents and record producers. In earlier years, McDowell held a variety of jobs, including picking cotton, driving a tractor, and working for an oil mill, a dairy, and a logging company. In 1940, when he applied for a Social Security card, he was employed by the Hotel Peabody in Memphis. Fifty-one years later the Peabody was the site of McDowell's posthumous induction into the Blues Hall of Fame. McDowell died at Baptist Hospital in Memphis on July 3, 1972. He is buried in the Hammond Hill M. B. Church cemetery north of Como.

MISSISSIPPI JOE CALLICOTT

1919 Getwell Road, Hernando, Mississippi

Although his early recording career resulted in only two songs issued in 1930, Nesbit native Joe Callicott (1899-1969) is often regarded as one of Mississippi's finest early bluesmen. His guitar work was also featured with local bluesman Garfield Akers on Cottonfield Blues, a classic 1929 single that illustrated how blues developed from field hollers. In the late 1960s Callicott recorded more extensively for folklorists and served as mentor to Nesbit guitarist Kenny Brown.

Callicott, whose music was notable for his delicate guitar style and rich vocals, spent most of his life here in Nesbit. He began playing blues as a young boy and performed for many years together with fellow guitarist Garfield Akers (c. 1900-1959). They played mostly around the area at informal gatherings and performed in a distinctive local style similar to that of Memphis blues pioneer Frank Stokes and Hernando's Jim Jackson. In 1929 Jackson arranged for the pair to record for the Brunswick-Balke-Collender corporation of Chicago, which had set up a temporary recording unit at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis.

Callicott's recording of "Mississippi Boll Weevil Blues" from that session was unissued, but he played on Akers' two-part single "Cottonfield Blues," which was issued on the Vocalion label. The following year they again recorded in Memphis. Vocalion issued "Dough Roller Blues" and "Jumpin' and Shoutin' Blues" by Akers, while Brunswick released Callicott's "Fare Thee Well Blues" and "Traveling Mama Blues" (using the spelling Calicott on the label and Callicutt in company files). Although Callicott gave up performing in the 1940s, Akers was active on the down-home Memphis blues scene of the early '50s. Akers, however, never recorded again.

In 1967 folklorist George Mitchell met and recorded Callicott, and Callicott's subsequent return to performing included a booking at the 1968 Memphis Country Blues Festival in Memphis and travels as far as New York City. Recordings made by Mitchell and British producer Mike Vernon of the Blue Horizon label revealed the impressive range of Callicott's early repertoire, which included songs about World War I and the boisterous nightlife of Beale Street. During this period Callicott also taught guitar to Kenny Brown (born in 1953), who lived with his family next door. Brown later became well known in the blues world via his twenty-year relationship with Holly Springs guitarist R. L. Burnside as well as his own recordings. On his 2003 Fat Possum CD Stingray, Brown recorded three of Callicott's songs.

Another young student of older blues artists in the area was Bobby Ray Watson (born in 1943) of the nearby Pleasant Hill community. Watson often performed together with local harmonica player Johnny Woods (1917-1990), a dynamic performer and native of nearby Looxahoma. This area's most famous resident, legendary pianist and vocalist Jerry Lee Lewis, included many blues songs in his repertoire. The Nesbit ranch purchased by Lewis in 1973 became a tourist attraction and featured a piano-shaped pool.

MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT

County Roads 41 and 254, Avalon, Mississippi

World-renowned master of the acoustic guitar John Hurt, an important figure in the 1960s folk blues revival, spent most of his life doing farm work around Avalon in Carroll County and performing for parties and local gatherings. Hurt (1893 to 1966) only began to earn a living from music after he left Mississippi in 1963 to play at folk festivals, colleges, and coffeehouses. His first recordings, 78 rpm discs released in 1928-29, are regarded as classics of the blues genre.

Mississippi John Hurt's delicate vocals, inventive fingerpicking on guitar, and warm personality endeared him to generations of music fans. Much of Hurt's material predated the blues, and his gentle style provided a stark contrast to the typically harsh approaches of Delta musicians such as Son House and Charley Patton. According to a family bible, Hurt was born on July 3, 1893, in Teoc, several miles southwest of here. Other sources, including his tombstone at the St. James Cemetery in Avalon, have suggested dates ranging from 1892 to 1900. He began playing guitar around age nine. By twenty Hurt was performing at parties and square dances, sometimes with local white fiddler Willie Narmour, who had a contract with Okeh Records. Narmour recommended Hurt to Okeh, and in 1928 Hurt traveled to Memphis and New York to record. His Okeh songs included the murder ballads "Frankie," "Stack O'Lee," and "Louis Collins;" "Spike Driver Blues" (Hurt's take on the John Henry legend); "Nobody's Dirty Business" (a tune with roots in 19th century minstrelsy); religious songs; and Hurt's own "Candy Man Blues" and "Got the Blues Can't Be Satisfied."

The recordings apparently had little effect on Hurt's lifestyle, and he continued to play regularly for locals at house parties, picnics, night spots, work sheds, hunting lodges, and at the Valley Store at this site. His older brother Junious also sometimes played harmonica here. For most of his life Hurt worked as a farmer, but he also worked in a factory in Jackson and at a local gravel pit, and was employed as a laborer for Illinois Central Railroad and the Works Progress Administration. One of Hurt's 1928 songs, "Avalon Blues," later provided record collector Tom Hoskins with a clue to his whereabouts, and in 1963 Hoskins located Hurt in Avalon and arranged for him to move to Washington, D.C., where he cut several albums and recorded for the Library of Congress. Hurt subsequently became a popular and beloved performer on the folk music circuit. His many admirers included the folk-rock band the Lovin' Spoonful, whose name was inspired by a line from Hurt's "Coffee Blues." In 1965 he moved to Grenada, Mississippi, where he died on November 2, 1966.

Other blues performers from Carroll County include G.L. Crockett, Jim Lockhart, and Art Browning from Carrollton; Brewer Phillips and Ben Wiley Payton from Coila; and Po' Bob Phillips from Black Hawk. Rockabilly artist Mack Allen Smith, a cousin to Narmour's partner Shell Smith, often saw Hurt playing in North Carrollton while growing up, and later recorded many blues songs as well as a version of Narmour and Smith's "Carroll County Blues."

MISSISSIPPI RIVER BLUES

Salisbury Avenue and Deer Creek Drive, Scott, Mississippi

Blues singers have recorded many songs in response to natural disasters, none more dramatic than those about the great flood of the Mississippi River that inundated much of the Delta after the levee broke just two and three quarter miles west of this site on April 21, 1927. Big Bill Broonzy, a world-famous bluesman who claimed Scott as his hometown, recorded several songs about floods and at his concerts he told vivid stories of the devastation and disruption the 1927 flood caused his family and thousands of others.

Big Bill Broonzy was one of many African American singers who documented floods of the Mississippi or other rivers in story or song. Charley Patton's "High Water Everywhere Part 1" and Barbecue Bob's "Mississippi Heavy Water Blues" described the Great Flood of 1927, while Broonzy recorded "Terrible Flood Blues" and "Southern Flood Blues" in the wake of the 1937 flooding of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and later also recorded versions of Bessie Smith's 1927 classic, "Back Water Blues."

The 1927 flood was a tragedy of Biblical proportions. Despite frantic efforts to shore up the levees after record rainfalls and overflows in tributaries to the river, a break occurred near here at Mounds Landing (identified as Mound Landing or Mound Crevasse on more recent maps). Water cascaded through a crevasse a half-mile wide, and within ten days, ten feet of water had covered a million acres and displaced thousands of people. The first structures destroyed included the cotton sharecroppers' tenant shacks that stood here on the property of Delta and Pine Land Company. In the aftermath of the flood recording companies sought out songs by blues, gospel, country, and pop artists. The blues songs that were recorded during the next few years addressed the physical destruction and human loss wrought by the flood, and some also alluded to the social injustices faced by African Americans who were forced to labor on levees and to live in refugee camps.

Big Bill Broonzy, whose real name was Lee Bradley, was born on June 26, 1903, near Lake Dick, Arkansas, outside Pine Bluff, although as an adult he identified Scott, Mississippi, as his birthplace. After moving to Chicago in the 1920s he launched a prolific recording career that made him one of the most popular blues musicians of the 1930s and '40s. Broonzy served as a mentor to Muddy Waters, Little Walter, and Memphis Slim, and also inspired British musicians such as Eric Clapton and Ray Davies when his European tours of the 1950s sparked a passion for the blues among overseas audiences. His autobiography *Big Bill Blues*, published in 1955, skillfully mixed tall tales with keenly-observed portraits of his family and musical colleagues. In his book, as in his song, "Black, Brown and White," Broonzy spoke out against racial inequality in America in an ironic but forceful tone. On the landmark album *Blues in the Mississippi Night*, produced by folklorist Alan Lomax, Big Bill led a conversation with John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson and Memphis Slim in which they described relations between blacks and whites in the rural South in alternately horrifying and entertaining terms. Broonzy died in Chicago on August 15, 1958, and was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1980.

MOSLEY and JOHNSON

114 Cleveland Street, New Albany, Mississippi

Although the African American community of New Albany has been small in number, it has produced many citizens of distinction. In the fields of blues, rhythm & blues, and gospel music, the names of Sam Mosley, Bob Johnson, Billy Ball, the Rev. Leon Pinson, and Elder Roma Wilson are known around the world. Mosley and Johnson, who launched a prolific creative partnership in 1967, performed together for 31 years and wrote songs for many of the top artists in blues.

Sam Mosley & Bob Johnson drafted their own hometown success story by utilizing their skills as performers, producers, and songwriters throughout their long tenure together in New Albany. As Mosley & Johnson, the team recorded several albums of blues and southern soul in the 1980s and '90s for the Muscle Shoals Sound and Malaco labels, but found a more lucrative niche as songwriters for Malaco artists Johnnie Taylor, Bobby Bland, Little Milton, and others. They recorded their first album, Mississippi Mud, on their own Sabo label in 1971, as Sam and Bob & the Soulmen. They also recorded in the 1970s for Polydor under the name Mojoba.

Sam Mosley was born in the Beaver Dam community on March 30, 1946, while Robert A. "Bob" Johnson was born in New Albany on March 4, 1946. Mosley's father, sharecropper Joe Mosley, played mandolin in a string band with Sam's uncles, Bud and Theodore ("Shoat"). In 1959 Joe's sons, Jamie, Sam, and Ralph, began performing as Jamie & the Dynamics. Sam left Mississippi for several years and served in Vietnam, but when he returned home in 1967 he hooked up with Johnson, an old schoolmate who was leading a band called Bobby Johnson & the Messengers. Although neither had formal musical training, they later learned the ins and outs of music arranging and producing when they worked with the vaunted Muscle Shoals studio band in Alabama. After Johnson died of a heart attack onstage at a Verona, Mississippi, performance on August 22, 1998, Mosley and Bob's brothers Willie and Miles continued to perform as the Mosley Johnson Band.

New Albany native Billy Ball, a pianist-saxophonist, shared Mosley and Johnson's approach by blending blues with soul music, R&B, and funk, but took a different path, establishing himself in Indianapolis, Indiana. He sang gospel with a family unit, the Ball Quartet, before joining the Tupelo band of George "Bally" Smith in the early '50s. He formed his own group, Billy Ball & the Upsetters, in 1957. After moving to Indiana, Ball assembled a new band of Upsetters, taught school, and recorded several 45s which are much sought-after among funk collectors.

Another musical lineage that has been traced back to New Albany is that of the Morganfield family who lived here in the 1800s. Dave Morganfield was one of several family members born into slavery who were enumerated in the first post-Civil War census here in 1870, when New Albany was still a part of Pontotoc County. His grandson, McKinley Morganfield, born in Issaquena County, went on to worldwide blues fame under the name Muddy Waters, and a number of other Morganfields were active in gospel music.

MUDDY WATERS BIRTHPLACE

130 Walnut Street, Rolling Fork, Mississippi

McKinley Morganfield, better known as Muddy Waters, was one of the foremost artists in blues history. In the late 1940s and 1950s he led the way in transforming traditional Delta blues into the electric Chicago blues style that paved the road to rock 'n' roll. Waters was born in the Jug's Corner community of rural Issaquena County but always claimed Rolling Fork as his birthplace. His birth date has been cited as April 4, 1913, 1914, or 1915.

His grandmother, Della Grant, nicknamed him "Muddy" because, as a baby on the Cottonwood Plantation near Mayersville, he loved to play in the mud. Childhood playmates tagged on "Water" or "Waters" a few years later. His father, Ollie Morganfield, was a sharecropper in the Rolling Fork area who also entertained at local blues affairs. But Waters was raised by his grandmother, who moved to the Stovall Plantation near Clarksdale when he was still a young child, and his influences were Delta musicians such as Son House, Robert Johnson, and Robert Nighthawk. Muddy first played harmonica with Stovall guitarist Scott Bohanner, but took up guitar under the older musician's tutelage, and later performed with another mentor, blues legend Big Joe Williams. He also played in a string band, the Son Sims Four, and drove a tractor on the Stovall Plantation, where he ran a juke joint out of his house.

Waters did his first recordings at Stovall in 1941 to 42 for a Library of Congress team led by Alan Lomax and John Work III. In 1943 he moved to Chicago, and by the end of the decade he was setting the pace on the competitive Chicago blues scene. The city was loaded with freshly arriving talent from Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana as southern farm workers continued to migrate to the alleged "promised land" of the north. Many of the finest musicians, including harmonica player Little Walter Jacobs, pianist Otis Spann, and guitarist Jimmy Rogers, worked in the seminal Muddy Waters Blues Band, which virtually defined the Chicago blues genre. Both through his recordings on the Aristocrat and Chess labels and through his sensual and electrifying live performances, he not only became a blues icon but a godfather to generations of rock 'n' roll bands, as he expanded his audience from the African American clubs of Chicago's South and West sides to Europe and beyond. The Rolling Stones recorded several of his songs and took their name from one of his early records, "Rollin' Stone." Jazz, R&B, country & western, and hip hop artists have used his material as well.

Other Muddy Waters classics, many written by Vicksburg native Willie Dixon, include "Got My Mojo Working," "Manish Boy," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "Hoochie Coochie Man," and "I'm Ready." Waters returned to visit or perform in Mississippi on occasion, and appeared at the Greenville V.F.W., the Ole Miss campus, and the 1981 Delta Blues Festival. A recipient of multiple Grammy awards, charter member of the Blues Foundation's Blues Hall of Fame, and 1987 inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Muddy Waters died in his sleep on April 30, 1983, at his home in Westmont, Illinois.

MUDDY WATERS' HOUSE

4000 Stovall Road, Clarksdale, Mississippi

Muddy Waters lived most of his first thirty years in a house on this site, part of the Stovall Plantation. In 1996 the restored house was put on display at the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale. Muddy Waters was first recorded here in 1941 by Alan Lomax, who was compiling songs for the Library of Congress. Muddy Waters is known as the king of Chicago blues.

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NEHEMIAH “SKIP” JAMES

Highway 49 south and Highway 433, Bentonia, Mississippi

The haunting quality of Nehemiah “Skip” James’s music earned him a reputation as one of the great early Mississippi bluesmen. James (1902 to 1969) grew up at the Woodbine Plantation and as a youth learned to play both guitar and piano. At his 1931 session for Paramount he recorded eighteen songs, including the dark-themed “Devil Got My Woman” and “Hard Time Killing Floor Blues.” He later became a minister, but returned to performing blues during the 1960s “blues revival.”

The music of Skip James and fellow Bentonia guitarists such as Henry Stuckey (1897 to 1966) and Jack Owens (1904-1997) is often characterized as a genre unto itself. The distinctive approach is notable for its ethereal sounds, open minor guitar tunings, gloomy themes, falsetto vocals, and songs that bemoan the work of the devil. Stuckey learned one of the tunings from Caribbean soldiers while serving in France during World War I, and said that he taught it to James, who went on to become the most famous of Bentonia's musicians. James was born on June 9, 1902, on the Woodbine Plantation where his mother Phyllis worked as a cook; his father, Edward, a guitarist, left the family when James was around five. Inspired by Stuckey, James began playing guitar as a child, and later learned to play organ. In his teens James began working on construction and logging projects across the mid-South, and sharpened his piano skills playing at work camp “barrelhouses.” In 1924 James returned to Bentonia, where he earned his living as a sharecropper, gambler and bootlegger, in addition to performing locally with Stuckey.

James traveled to Grafton, Wisconsin, for his historic 1931 session for Paramount Records, which included thirteen songs on guitar and five on piano. “Hard Time Killing Floor Blues” alluded to the Great Depression, while the gun-themed “22-20 Blues” provided the model for Robert Johnson's “32-20 Blues,” and the haunting “Devil Got My Woman” was the likely inspiration for Johnson's “Hell Hound on My Trail.” James’s records sold poorly, and later in 1931 he moved to Dallas, where he served as a minister and led a gospel group. He later stayed in Birmingham, Alabama, and in Hattiesburg and Meridian, Mississippi, occasionally returning to Bentonia. When he applied for a Social Security card in 1937, he was employed locally by the Cage Brothers (probably the Cage family who had a farm north of town). He returned in 1948 and sometimes played for locals at the newly opened Blue Front Cafe, although he did not earn his living as a musician. He later lived in Memphis and Tunica County, where he was located in 1964 by blues enthusiasts who persuaded him to begin performing again.

James relocated to Washington, D. C., and then to Philadelphia to play folk and blues festivals and clubs. He recorded several albums and gained new renown from the rock group Cream’s 1966 cover of his song “I’m So Glad,” but the somber quality of much of his music and his insistence on artistic integrity over entertainment value limited his popular appeal. James died in Philadelphia on October 3, 1969. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1992.

NELSON STREET

700 Nelson Street, Greenville, Mississippi

Nelson Street was once the epicenter of African American business and entertainment in the Delta. Nightclubs, cafes, churches, groceries, fish markets, barbershops, laundries, record shops, and other enterprises did a bustling trade. Famous blues clubs on the street included the Casablanca, the Flowing Fountain, and the Playboy Club. Willie Love saluted the street in his 1951 recording “Nelson Street Blues.”

Whereas many Delta towns once “rolled up the sidewalks” in time for curfews, Greenville nurtured a flourishing nightlife, especially during the 1940s and ‘50s. Blues artists and audiences from throughout the area gravitated to the cafes, pool halls, and nightclubs of Nelson Street. The music ranged from raw Delta blues to big band jump blues and jazz. Years before he became America’s top black recording artist, Louis Jordan joined local bandleader and music educator Winchester Davis for some performances here in 1928.

When down-home southern blues was at its commercial peak in the American rhythm and blues industry in the early 1950s, record companies headed for Nelson Street in search of talent. Leading lights on the local scene included Willie Love and Sonny Boy Williamson number 2, both of whom recorded for the Jackson-based Trumpet label. In 1952 Charlie Booker and others recorded for the rival Modem Records at the Casablanca, an upscale restaurant and lounge at 1102 Nelson, which advertised its services “For Colored Only.” In the midst of one session, the local sheriff ordered the recording stopped when artists contracted to Trumpet attempted to record for Modem. The resulting lawsuit made headlines in the national trade papers.

One of the Casablanca recordings, Charlie Booker’s “No Ridin’ Blues,” joined Willie Love’s “Nelson Street Blues” as a local anthem when Booker sang, “Greenville’s smokin’, Leland’s burnin’ down.” Booker, Love, and Little Milton Campbell were among the blues artists who had their own radio shows on WGVM or WJPR. Disc jockey Rocking Eddie Williams later had a record store on Nelson Street. Blues venues of the 1950s included Henry T’s Pool Room, the Silver Dollar Cafe, and the Blue Note.

Nelson Street alumni include Oliver Sain, Eddie Shaw, J. W. “Big Moose” Walker, Burgess Gardner, Lil’ Bill Wallace, Roosevelt “Booba” Barnes, Willie Foster, T-Model Ford, John Horton, and Lil’ Dave Thompson, as well as Greenville’s first black policeman, guitarist Willie “Burl” Carson. The most successful of them all, Little Milton, paid tribute to the Flowing Fountain, a Nelson Street show club, in his 1987 Malaco Records hit “Annie Mae’s Cafe.”

OKTIBBEHA COUNTY BLUES

206 Fellowship Street, Starkville, Mississippi

Oktibbeha County has produced several blues artists who achieved fame for their recordings and live performances in Chicago, California, or other areas. Blues Hall of Famer Big Joe Williams (c. 1903-1982), who waxed the classic "Baby Please Don't Go," was born close to Noxubee Swamp on the southern edge of the county. Tony Hollins (1910-c. 1959), who hailed from the Starkville-Osborn area, and Sturgis native Lou Thomas Watts (1934-1970), aka Kid Thomas, left small but significant bodies of recorded work.

Oktibbeha County blues performers have been featured at local clubs, restaurants, juke joints, festivals, and Mississippi State University events, and the music of locally born blues recording artists has reached audiences around the world. Big Joe Williams, one of the most prolific and well-traveled figures in blues history, maintained close ties to Oktibbeha County throughout his life. A longtime resident of the Crawford area, Williams recorded hundreds of tracks between 1935 and 1980. He also acted as a session producer and talent scout, resulting in recordings made at a Starkville radio station by Shortstuff Macon, Glover Lee Connor, Williams, and his uncles, Bert and Russ Logan, in 1965 and 1971. In 1941 Williams and guitarist Tony Hollins, whose family lived in Osborn in 1910, became the first artists to record the song "Crawlin' King Snake," which was later covered by John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Bob Dylan, and the Doors. Hollins also made the earliest recording of the blues standard "Cross Cut Saw." During the 1930s and '40s Hollins lived and performed in the Delta and was regarded as a major influence by Hooker.

Lou Thomas Watts, who recorded under the name Kid Thomas, among others, left Sturgis at an early age when his family moved to Chicago. Watts said he taught drums to school-mate Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, who later gained fame as a member of the Muddy Waters band, and in turn Smith taught Watts harmonica. Watts made records that ranged from frantic Little Richard-style rock 'n' roll to deep Chicago harmonica blues. After moving to Wichita and then to Los Angeles, he was just gaining the attention of the international blues community when he was shot to death by a distraught father whose son had been struck and killed by Watts in an auto accident.

In Starkville, singer Willie Harrington and bassist Raymond Doss founded the Flames, a popular soul, funk, and blues band, in 1972. The group broke up in 1978 but was revived in 1997. Over the years the Flames performed at local venues including the Underground, Rick's Cafe Americain, the Dark Horse Tavern, and the Veranda. Emmett "Piano Red" Hudson (1909-1993) from Clay County, also performed for college crowds and at clubs in the area. Guitarist Big John Henry Miller, who recorded in Chicago in 1965, was a Starkville native, as was St. Louis guitarist Little Robert Weaver (1933-1993). Social Security files suggest that Lonnie Williams, a blues guitarist who, according to Williams, was an important local influence on Elvis Presley in Tupelo, may have also been born in Starkville. Activity in the area has included the Osborn Blues Festival in the 1980s, the long-running Down Home Blues Festival just north of the county line in West Point, and an event that honors a predecessor to blues music, ragtime: the Ragtime Jazz Festival (sponsored by the Mississippi State University Library and the Charles Templeton Sr. Music Museum, repository of a large music collection amassed by Templeton, a Starkville businessman.)

OTHA TURNER

217 Main Street, Como, Mississippi

The African American fife and drum tradition in north Mississippi stretches back to the 1800s and is often noted for its similarities to African music. Its best known exponent, Otha (or Othar) Turner (circa 1908 to 2003), presided over annual fife and drum picnics and goat roasts on his property in nearby Gravel Springs, and performed at numerous festivals. His music was featured in several documentaries as well as in Martin Scorsese's film *Gangs of New York*.

The fife and drum ensemble is most closely associated with military marches, but African American bands in North Mississippi have long used fifes and drums to provide entertainment at picnics and other social events. Many scholars believe that such groups formed in the wake of the Civil War, perhaps using discarded military instruments. Prior to the war slaves were largely forbidden from playing drums out of fear that they would use the instruments for secret communication, though African Americans did serve in military units as musicians, playing fifes, drums, and trumpets. North Mississippi fife and drum music is often described as sounding "African," but it was not imported directly from Africa. Instead it appears that African American musicians infused the Euro-American military tradition with distinctly African polyrhythms, riff structures, and call-and-response patterns. Fife and drum bands have performed spirituals, minstrel songs, instrumental pieces such as "Shimmy She Wobble," and versions of blues hits including the Mississippi Sheiks' "Sitting On Top of the World" and Little Walter's "My Babe." While the black fife and drum tradition is identified with northern Mississippi, researchers have also documented the music in other areas, including southwestern Mississippi, western Tennessee, and west central Georgia.

In 1942 multi-instrumentalist Sid Hemphill and his band made the first recordings of Mississippi fife and drum music for Library of Congress folklorist Alan Lomax. His granddaughter, blues singer-guitarist Jessie Mae Hemphill, later played drums in local fife and drum bands. Lomax also recorded fife and drum music by brothers Ed and Lonnie Young in 1959. In the 1960s and '70s folklorists George Mitchell, David Evans, and Bill Ferris recorded groups featuring Napolian Strickland (circa 1919 to 2001) on fife and Otha Turner on bass drum.

Turner, born in Rankin County around 1908, various sources suggest birth years ranging from 1903 to 1917, moved to northern Mississippi as a child together with his mother, Betty Turner. He learned to create his own fifes by using a heated metal rod to hollow out and bore a mouth hole and five finger holes into a piece of bamboo cane. Turner, who spent most of his life as a farmer, eventually became the patriarch of the regional fife and drum tradition. He recorded as leader of the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band for various American and European labels and appeared in several documentaries, including *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum*, *Blues Story*, *Lomax's Land Where the Blues Began*, and Martin Scorsese's *Feel Like Going Home*. Following his death in 2003 his granddaughter and protégé Sharde Thomas inherited leadership of his fife and drum band.

OTIS CLAY

Edward-Allen Flore Memorial Park, Waxhaw Road, Waxhaw, Mississippi

Otis Clay, one of America's premier singers of soul and gospel music, was born in Waxhaw on February 11, 1942. His storied journey to international renown began at the age of four at the Tree of Life Missionary Baptist Church here, where he attended school and sang with a family gospel group. Clay first performed professionally with gospel quartets in Chicago. He started recording soul music in the 1960s and maintained a unique and successful career singing both sacred and secular music.

Otis Clay began singing bass in a group called the Christian Travelers with a brother, cousin, and two nephews here in Waxhaw in 1946. The Clay children worked the family farm and went to school at the church that was just a few yards from their home. The Clays moved back and forth from Waxhaw over the years, living also in Clarksdale and later in Muncie, Indiana, where Otis sang with another family group, the Morning Glories, and with a local quartet, the Voices of Hope. By 1956 he was singing with the D. Z. Jackson Chorus at his grandfather's church in Chicago, and after one more trip back to Waxhaw, he returned to Chicago to stay in 1957. As his reputation grew, he sang with a series of gospel quartets, including the Golden Jubilaires, the Blue Jay Singers, the Holy Wonders, the Pilgrim Harmonizers, the Gospel Songbirds, and the Sensational Nightingales. With the Blue Jays in 1960 he got his first professional experience touring the country and also expanded his repertoire beyond religious songs, as the historic quartet was advertised as singing "Old Negro Spirituals and Plantation Melodies." He recorded as lead vocalist for the Gospel Songbirds in 1964, but by that time he had already secretly tried his hand at rhythm & blues with a recording session for Columbia that remained unissued.

Clay's public move into soul music came in 1965 at One-derful! Records, a Chicago label owned by another former Mississippian, George Leaner. With hits on One-derful!, Cotillion, Hi, and Kayvette Records, most notably the 1972 Hi single "Trying to Live My Life Without You," Clay established himself as a quintessential performer in the genre that came to be known as "deep soul." In its sincere, gospel-rooted style and in Clay's warm and uplifting approach, his secular music was often not far removed from the religious songs he continued to sing in churches and gospel concerts. His crowd-pleasing, inspirational live performances won him new audiences at blues clubs and festivals and at enthusiastic soul music gatherings in Japan, Europe, and, in 2010, China. Clay's engaging vocal talents brought him additional acclaim as a guest singer on albums with blues, soul, rock, and gospel performers including Roy Buchanan, Magic Slim, Eddy Clearwater, Don Covay, Tyrone Davis, Johnny Rawls, and Clarence Fountain, and on CD tributes to acts as varied as Led Zeppelin, Duke Ellington, Robert Johnson, Janis Joplin, Aerosmith, and Van Morrison. Clay also sang at funeral services for Albert King, Tyrone Davis, Junior Parker, Magic Sam, Sunnyland Slim, and other blues and soul singers. In October 2010 Clay celebrated his fiftieth anniversary in show business.

OTIS RUSH

256 West Beacon Street, Philadelphia, Mississippi

The blues form reached both artistic and emotional peaks in the works of Otis Rush, who was born south of Philadelphia in Neshoba County in 1935. His music, shaped by the hardships and troubles of his early life in Mississippi, came to fruition in Chicago in the 1950s. As a singer, guitarist, bandleader, and songwriter, Rush set new standards in Chicago blues and influenced countless blues and rock musicians, including Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Otis Rush rose from the poverty of a Mississippi sharecropper's life to international fame as one of the most passionate singers and brilliant guitarists in the blues world. Rush, the sixth of seven children, was born in 1935, according to family sources, although biographies often give his birth date as 1934. His mother, Julia Campbell Boyd, ended up raising her family alone on plantations in Neshoba and Kemper counties. During the throes of the Great Depression in a segregated society, times were hard, with the children often missing school to work in the cotton fields, but Julia Boyd did own a wind-up Victrola record player. Rush heard blues records at home and on jukeboxes in Philadelphia when his mother would bring him to town. He began playing harmonica, and also sang in a church choir.

When his oldest brother, Leroy Boyd, was away from home, Otis started secretly playing Leroy's guitar. With no musical training, he devised his own unorthodox method, playing left-handed with the guitar upside down. Rush's distinctive style was rooted in his self-taught technique and his ability to transform sounds he heard into notes on his guitar. One sound he recalled from his childhood was Leroy's whistling.

As a young teen, Rush was already married, sharecropping cotton and corn on a five-acre plot. On Otis Lewis's plantation, Rush heard guitarist Vaughan Adams, but there were few other blues musicians around Philadelphia. Rush only became inspired to be a professional musician after visiting his sister in Chicago. She took him to a Muddy Waters performance, and, as Rush recalled, "I flipped out, man. I said, 'Damn. This is for me.'"

Rush moved to Chicago and learned Waters's music, but soon developed a more modern, original approach that made him one of the most exciting young talents in the blues world. In 1956, his first record, "I Can't Quit You Baby," produced by Willie Dixon on the Cobra label, was a national rhythm & blues hit, later covered by Led Zeppelin and Little Milton Campbell. Its depth and intensity set the tone for the music Rush trademarked—heartrending blues that sometimes brought audiences to tears. Rush continued to perform in Chicago and around the world, developing devoted followings in Europe and Japan. Heralded as a "guitar hero," he shared stages with Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana, Buddy Guy, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. He was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 1984, and won a Grammy award in 1998 for his CD *Any Place I'm Going*.

OXFORD AND LAFAYETTE COUNTY BLUES

Courthouse Square, Oxford, Mississippi

Lafayette County's blues history has encompassed a wide range of activity by scholars, promoters, record companies, and musicians. The nightlife of Oxford has welcomed both local performers and national touring acts. The most famous musician born in the county, R. L. Burnside, achieved international acclaim while recording for Oxford-based Fat Possum Records. Some of the earliest documentation of blues was conducted here by Howard Odum in the early 1900s.

Lafayette County is best known as the home of Ole Miss and William Faulkner, but it also shares the "hill country" blues traditions found in neighboring counties Marshall, Panola, and Tate. The region's distinctive fife and drum picnics often took place in Oxford on the property of African American businesswoman Molly Barr, performed by fife player Tom Lewis, drummers Lacey Redmond and Clint Yarborough, and others. R. L. Burnside (1926-2005), who became the most famous exponent of hill country blues in the 1990s, was born in the College Hill community north of Oxford. He later settled near Holly Springs, but often performed in Oxford, as did his sons Duwayne and Garry and grandsons Cedric and Cody. The Fat Possum label, founded in Oxford in 1991, recorded Burnside and other hill country blues artists including Junior Kimbrough, Robert Belfour, Kenny Brown, and David (Malone) Kimbrough.

In the 1960s the leading blues and R&B group in Oxford was the Checkmates, whose initial lead vocalist, Henry Cook, had earlier led Little Henry and the Houserockers. Vocalist-bassist Herbert Wiley, a cousin of Cook's, later fronted the Checkmates, which also included Melvin Booker, Ivory Redmond, and Samuel Torrance, the band director at Oxford Training School. The Checkmates performed at campus fraternity parties, at clubs as far away as Chicago, and for local African American audiences at clubs on Old Sardis Road including Floyd Holman's, "Tom Charlie's," and the Backwater Inn, run by "Big Boy" and "Little Boy" Pegues, who also ran a juke joint on the east end of Oxford. Other local blues musicians included guitarist Sam Langhorn, his brother, vocalist Paul Willis Langhorn, bandleader-guitarist Tommy Brooks, and guitarists Jim Boles and Louwell Goodman. According to Herbert Wiley, 1930s recording artist Geeshie Wiley was a distant cousin; it is also likely that Tom Dickson, who recorded for Okeh in 1928, was from Oxford.

Blues achieved a higher profile in Oxford with the establishment at Ole Miss in 1977 of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, whose founding director was blues scholar Dr. William Ferris. The many blues aficionados attracted to Oxford included writer Robert Palmer, who taught popular music courses at the university and produced some of the first releases on Fat Possum. Photographer and writer Dick Waterman, who managed many leading blues artists beginning in the 1960s, continued his work after moving to Oxford in the 1980s. Blues musicians have frequently played at downtown venues including the Hoka, the Gin, Syd & Harry's, Blind Jim's, Proud Larry's, Two Stick, and Rooster's Blues House. Among the many blues artists to record at local studios was Buddy Guy, whose Grammy-winning Blues Singer was cut at the Sweet Tea Recording Studio.

PAPA LIGHTFOOT AND THE NATCHEZ BLUES

Jack Waite Park, McCabe Street, Natchez, Mississippi

The rich legacy of blues, jazz, and gospel in Natchez has often been obscured by the tragic shadow of the notorious Rhythm Club fire that claimed some 200 lives here in 1940. Alexander "Papa George" Lightfoot was one of the most talented blues harmonica players of the post-World War 2 era, and in later years Jimmy Anderson, Hezekiah Early, Elmo Williams, and brothers Theodis and Y. Z. Ealey brought their Bluff City blues to audiences across the country and overseas.

African American music in Natchez has spanned an extraordinarily wide spectrum, encompassing fife and drum groups, string bands, dance orchestras, jazz, rhythm & blues, down-home blues, hip hop, gospel, and more. Among the performers active in the pre-World War II years were fiddler Butch Cage, female guitarist Geeshie Wiley, Bud Scott and his Syncopators, and several who continued to perform locally after the war, including pianist Tom Griffin, guitarist William "Cat-Iron" Carradine, and bandleading saxophonists Earl Reed and Otis Smith. The most famous and most memorialized event in Natchez musical history was the devastating fire at the Rhythm Club on April 23, 1940. Chicago bandleader Walter Barnes and most of his orchestra perished along with almost two hundred Natchez residents, including Brumfield High School music instructor Woodrich McGuire and three student bandmembers. When Library of Congress folklorists John A. Lomax and his wife Ruby stopped in Natchez in October of 1940 on a field recording expedition, Ruby Lomax wrote, "Any songs besides spirituals are hard to get here; for that terrible dance hall fire of several months ago has sent the Negro population to the mourners' bench, and they will not sing 'reels' or 'worl'y' songs." However, the Lomaxes did succeed in recording Natchez blues guitarists Lucius Curtis, Willie Ford, and George Baldwin, as well as spiritual singer Alice "Judge" Richardson.

As music resumed in the clubs and cafes of Franklin, Pine, and St. Catherine streets, new talents emerged in the 1940s and '50s. "Papa George" Lightfoot became the best known Natchez blues artist of the era after he appeared on national radio broadcasts and recorded for several prominent record labels. Lightfoot (1924 to 1971) made some of his first recordings for the Sultan label, a company formed by an interracial Natchez partnership in 1950. One of its partners, Jack Davis, also recorded with his Blues Blasters band, which included James Rowan on trumpet and Joe Frazier on drums. Papa Lightfoot's mastery of the harmonica is still heralded today, but he was unable to sustain a musical career and was remembered by many in Natchez as an ice cream peddler.

Jimmy Anderson, another noted harmonica player from Natchez, also achieved some renown as a blues recording artist in Louisiana in the 1960s. He later worked in Natchez as a radio announcer, broadcasting under the moniker "Soul Man Lee." The fertile Natchez blues tradition has also been enriched by "Stormy Herman" Colbert, Eugene Butler and the Rocking Royals, Y. Z. Ealey and the Merrymakers, Hezekiah Early and the Houserockers, Elmo Williams, Theodis Ealey, and others.

PARCHMAN FARM BLUES

Highway 49 West at Highway 32, Parchman, Mississippi

The Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman has inspired many songs, including “Parchman Farm Blues” by singer-guitarist Booker “Bukka” White, who was once an inmate here, and “Parchman Farm” by jazz singer-pianist Mose Allison. Folklorists from the Library of Congress and other institutions also came to Parchman beginning in the 1930s to document the pre-blues musical forms of field hollers and work songs, which survived here due to the prison’s relative isolation from modern cultural influences.

Parchman Farm In 1900 the state of Mississippi began buying parcels of land near this site for a penitentiary and soon accumulated about 16,000 acres, over half of which had been owned by the Parchman family. For decades the prison operated essentially as a for-profit cotton plantation; prisoners grew their own food, made their own clothing, raised livestock, and even served as armed guards or “trustee shooters.” The harsh working and living conditions made “Parchman Farm” notorious, but the state was later able to improve Parchman’s image by implementing prison reforms.

Folklorists Alan Lomax, his father John A. Lomax, Herbert Halpert, and William Ferris found Parchman to be a rich repository of older musical traditions. Prisoners had little access to radio or records and, to help pace their labors and pass the day, often joined in work songs that had survived from earlier decades. Alan Lomax observed that such songs “revived flagging spirits, restored energy to failing bodies, [and] brought laughter to silent misery.” The Lomaxes first visited Parchman in 1933 and returned numerous times to record blues, work songs, spirituals, and personal interviews with inmates. The unaccompanied vocals by female inmates recorded in the prison’s sewing room in 1936 and 1939 have been cited by blues scholar Samuel Charters as an invaluable document of the way blues must have sounded in its earliest stages. Other notable recordings include a 1939 session with bluesman Booker “Bukka” White and a 1959 recording of James Carter’s gospel song “Po Lazarus,” which later appeared on the Grammy-winning soundtrack to the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

White also recorded several memorable songs about his imprisonment, including “When Can I Change My Clothes” and “Parchman Farm Blues” in 1940, shortly after his release from Parchman. Other blues artists who served sentences here include R. L. Burnside, John “Big Bad Smitty” Smith, Terry “Big T” Williams, and, reportedly, Aleck “Rice” Miller (Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2), while songs with Parchman themes were recorded by Charley Patton, Wade Walton, and others. Mose Allison, who grew up in nearby Tippoo, first recorded his “Parchman Farm” in 1957, and many artists including John Mayall and Johnny Winter later recorded it. Former rockabilly singer Wendell Cannon organized a prison band program here in 1960 and took groups consisting of trustee inmates to perform across the state for several decades. Blues artists who participated in the band program included David (Malone) Kimbrough, Jr., and Mark “Muleman” Massey.

PINETOP PERKINS

Highway 49, Belzoni, Mississippi

Blues piano master Joe Willie “Pinetop” Perkins was born on July 7, 1913, on the Honey Island Plantation, seven miles southeast of Belzoni. Perkins spent much of his career accompanying blues icons such as Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 and Muddy Waters. After he began to tour and record as a featured singer and soloist in the 1980s, Perkins earned a devoted following among enthusiasts who hailed him as the venerated elder statesman of blues piano.

Pinetop Perkins did not have an album under his own name in the United States until he was seventy-five years old (in 1988), but during the next two decades he recorded more than fifteen LPs and CDs as the reigning patriarch of blues piano. Perkins started out on guitar, but he also learned piano as a youngster, influenced by local pianists and by the records of Clarence “Pine Top” Smith and others. Smith’s “Pine Top’s Boogie Woogie” of 1929 was so popular that many pianists, including Perkins, took up boogie woogie and sometimes even adopted the name “Pine Top,” or “Pinetop.”

Perkins spent much of his childhood moving around the Delta, living with his mother or other relatives, or with his friend, guitarist Boyd Gilmore, on a plantation with Gilmore’s grandparents. Perkins picked cotton, worked as handyman, mechanic, and truck driver, and began playing at juke joints, house parties, and cockfights. His first professional job in music was as a guitarist with blues legend Robert Nighthawk. In the 1940s Perkins played piano on radio broadcasts with Nighthawk and with Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller) on KFFA in Helena, Arkansas. When a woman stabbed him in Helena, the injury forced him to give up the guitar, although he was already becoming better known as a pianist. Perkins also drove a tractor on the Hopson plantation near Clarksdale. In Clarksdale he later mentored a young Ike Turner on piano and began working with another prodigy, guitarist Earl Hooker.

Perkins first recorded as pianist on a Nighthawk session in Chicago in 1950. In 1953 Perkins recorded two versions of “Pinetop’s Boogie Woogie” when he, Boyd Gilmore, and Earl Hooker did a session together for Sam Phillips’s Sun label in Memphis. Pinetop continued to play with Nighthawk, Hooker, and others at different times and also worked at a laundry and a garage. In 1969, when Otis Spann, another noted pianist with Belzoni roots, left the Muddy Waters band, Waters called on Perkins to take his place. International touring and recording with Muddy brought him widespread recognition, and he made his first album in 1976 for a French label. In 1980 Perkins and other band members left Muddy and formed the Legendary Blues Band. After recording two albums with the unit, Perkins embarked on his belated solo career.

In addition to Perkins and Spann, other blues artists who were born in or near Belzoni or who lived here include Denise LaSalle, Boyd Gilmore, Eddie Burns, Paul “Wine” Jones, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2, and Elmore James.

PINEY WOODS SCHOOL

Highway 49, Piney Woods, Mississippi

The musical programs of the Piney Woods School have produced many fine artists over the decades, including bluesman Sam Myers, who sang in vocal groups while attending a school for the blind located here. The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, a renowned all-female jazz orchestra, was founded at the school, and the original members of the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi first sang together here as members of the Cotton Blossom Singers.

One of the main educational concerns of Professor Laurence Clifton Jones, who founded the Piney Woods Country Life School in 1909, was musical training. The school boasted a piano while it was still housed in a converted sheep shed, and beginning in 1923 Jones sent out various groups named the Cotton Blossom Singers across the nation on fundraising tours, sometimes for months at a time. The “Mississippi School for the Blind for Negroes” was also located at Piney Woods between 1929 and 1951, and among the groups who performed a mix of spirituals and popular songs was a quartet of blind students led by Archie Brownlee (1925 to 1960). The group began singing on campus in 1936 and the following year John A. and Alan Lomax recorded them for the Library of Congress. Later, as the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, the group popularized the “hard gospel” style of quartet singing, and Brownlee’s dramatic vocal approach, accented by moans, shrieks and wails, influenced soul singers including Ray Charles, James Brown, and Wilson Pickett.

In the mid-‘30s Jones started several new jazz bands at Piney Woods, including the all-male Syncollegians and the all-female Sweethearts of Rhythm. Consuella Carter, the first leader of the group, later directed the music program at Coahoma Junior College in Clarksdale. Most of the Sweethearts were African Americans, but the group earned the tag “international” due to the Chinese, Mexican and Hawaiian heritage of some of its members. The Sweethearts began touring nationally in 1939, but in early 1941 they cut ties with the school and went professional. They became the most popular of the female bands that proliferated during World War II, when many male musicians were serving in the military. Their understudies at Piney Woods, the Junior Sweethearts of Rhythm, continued to perform as the Swinging Rays of Rhythm.

Laurel-born bluesman Sam Myers (1936 to 2006), who was legally blind, began attending Piney Woods at age 10, and soon played trumpet and drums and sang in the school’s groups. After graduation Myers studied music in Chicago and began performing blues professionally with Elmore James and others. Myers cut his first single in 1957 for the Jackson-based Ace label, and later found acclaim as the lead singer and harmonica player with the Texas group Anson Funderburgh and the Rockets. Other blues artists who attended Piney Woods included guitarist Jody Williams, who worked with Bo Diddley and Howlin’ Wolf, and drummer Billy Stepney, a native of Grenada.

PO' MONKEYS

Dillion Road, Merigold, Mississippi

The rural juke joint played an integral role in the development of the blues, offering a distinctly secular space for people to socialize, dance, and forget their everyday troubles. While many such juke joints once dotted the cotton fields of the Delta countryside, Po' Monkey's was one of the relatively few to survive into the 21st century. Initially frequented by locals, Po' Monkey's became a destination point for blues tourists from around the world during the 1990s.

According to Willie "Po' Monkey" Seaberry he opened a juke joint at his home in this location in 1963. Seaberry (born 1941) worked as a farmer and operated the club, where he continued to live, at night. By the 1990s Po' Monkey's was attracting a mixed crowd of locals as well as college students from Delta State University and blues aficionados in search of "authentic" juke joints. The dramatic décor both inside and outside the club also attracted attention from news outlets including the New York Times and noted photographers including Annie Leibovitz and Mississippi's Birney Imes, who featured the club in his 1990 book *Juke Joint*.

Despite such notoriety Po' Monkey's in many ways continued to typify the rural juke joint, furnished with a jukebox, a pool table, beer posters stapled to the walls, and Christmas lights strung across the walls and ceiling. Modern juke joints were preceded by informal "jookhouses" that were actually tenants' houses on plantations. Residents would clear the furniture from the largest room and spread sawdust on the floor in preparation for an evening, and often sold fried fish and homemade liquor to those who gathered for music, dancing, and gambling. Such gatherings were called house parties, fish fries, country suppers, Saturday night suppers, balls, or frolics. Many musicians recall first hearing blues at jookhouses run by neighbors or family members. Some artists, including Muddy Waters, ran their own juke joints in Mississippi. In the 1930s coin-operated phonographs became widely distributed throughout the South and quickly became known as "jukeboxes." Since that time, most music at juke joints (including Po' Monkey's) has been provided not by live performers but by jukeboxes and, later, by deejays.

The term "juke", sometimes spelled "jook" and often pronounced to rhyme with "book" rather than "duke", may have either African or "Gullah" origins, and scholars have suggested meanings including "wicked or disorderly," "to dance," and "a place of shelter." Used as a noun, "juke" refers to small African American-run bars, cafes, and clubs such as Po' Monkey's; as a verb, it refers to partying. Variations of "jook" first appeared on recordings in the 1930s, and at a 1936 session in Hattiesburg the Mississippi Jook Band made what were later described as the first "rock 'n' roll" records. "Juke" gained widespread recognition in 1952 as the title of a hit record by blues harmonica player Little Walter. More formal establishments in towns and cities eventually replaced most rural juke joints, but juke joints continued to occupy an important place in the imagination of blues fans and performers. In the 21st century Mississippians Little Milton, Lee Shot Williams, Bill "Howlin' Madd" Perry, and Johnny Drummer sang and composed new songs about juke joints, and in 2004 Clarksdale established an annual "Juke Joint Festival" to celebrate the city's down-home venues.

QUEEN CITY HOTEL & 7th AVENUE NORTH

7th Avenue North and 15th Street, Columbus, Mississippi

For several decades beginning in the early 1900s, the Queen City Hotel, which stood across the street from this site, was at the center of a vibrant African American community along 7th Avenue North. Clubs and cafes in the area featured blues, jazz, and rhythm & blues, and the hotel housed visiting musical celebrities, including B. B. King, Duke Ellington, and James Brown, as well as professional African American athletes. The hotel was founded by a former slave, Robert Walker.

Seventh Avenue North During the segregation era this area housed many businesses catering specifically to African Americans, including the Queen City Hotel. Hotel founder Robert Walker (c. 1848-1931) had worked previously as a cook and as a “drayman” and “hackman” (horse-and-wagon or -buggy operator), according to census records. The first Columbus City Directory (1912) lists Walker running a boarding house at 1504 7th Avenue North, and by the 1920s the structure was listed as the Queen City Hotel.

In the late '40s Ed Bush (1908-1982) bought the property from Walker's estate, tore down the original wooden building, and built a two-story brick hotel. As a young man Bush had worked as a bellboy at the downtown Gilmer Hotel, and with the financial assistance of Gilmer owner J. W. Slaughter he opened businesses including a café, pool hall, dry goods store, barbershop and dry cleaners on Catfish Alley (South 4th Street). The New Queen City Hotel officially opened in 1948.

The Queen City Hotel anchored the Seventh Avenue North district, known locally as “down on the block,” which stretched from 13th to 20th streets and fanned out several blocks in each direction. Locals have recalled nationally prominent musicians including Bobby “Blue” Bland, Little Richard, Little Willie John, Earl “Fatha” Hines, Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and Pearl Bailey performing at the Blue Room, operated by Billups Evans at 906 14th Street, and the Savoy, owned by Jim Sykes, at the intersection of Seventh Avenue North and 19th Street. Ed Bush was a member of the leading local jazz and blues band, the Rhythm Kings, which played at venues including the Queen City's ballroom and also toured regionally to Starkville, Aberdeen, West Point and Okolona. Other local gathering places for dancing or listening to music included the Elks Club, the Deluxe Café, Richardson Café, the Cozy Corner, the Tic Toc 1 and Tic Toc 2, and the Red Rooster, and, in later years, the Flamingo Lounge, Ladies Inn, the Cotton Club, and the Crystal Room.

Seventh Avenue North was one of many African American business districts across the nation that ironically declined after the end of official segregation. In 1996 the Weather- spoon family bought the vacant Queen City Hotel, but despite a campaign to preserve the building, it was demolished in 2007. An informal festival celebrating the neighborhood's cultural legacy began in early 1980s, and by 2010 the Seventh Avenue Heritage Festival was drawing over 10,000 visitors.

QUEEN OF HEARTS

2243 Martin Luther King Drive, Jackson, Mississippi

The Queen of Hearts, a primary venue for down-home blues in Jackson, opened at this location in the 1970s. During the following decades, owner-operator Chellie B. Lewis presented the blues bands of King Edward, Sam Myers, Big Bad Smitty, and many others. The house behind the club at 905 Ann Banks Street was owned and occupied in the 1960s by blues singer-guitarist Johnnie Temple, who had been a popular recording artist in Chicago in the 1930s and '40s.

Jackson became an important center for the blues in the early 1900s, when musicians from rural communities came here to play for crowds on the capital city's streets and in its many venues. Live blues continued to thrive in Jackson into the twenty-first century, thanks to clubs such as the Queen of Hearts, where owner Chellie B. Lewis booked musicians and cooked soul food every weekend for decades. A native of Bolton, Mississippi, Lewis opened the club as "Nina's Lounge" after taking over the lease from Mose Chinn, whose brother Clarence ran the popular New Club Desire in Canton. Lewis had previously operated a "whiskey house" with a jukebox in the nearby Maple Street Apartments and worked as a waiter at Percy Simpson's nightclub on Moonbeam Street, where he would sometimes play piano with Elmore James's band.

John "Big Bad Smitty" Smith, a native of Vicksburg, was the first featured musician at the Queen of Hearts and was followed by bands led by King Edward (Antoine), Cadillac George Harris, Tommy "T. C." Carter, Norman Clark, and Roosevelt Robinson, Jr. Others who performed or sat in at the Queen of Hearts included Sam Myers, McKinley Mitchell, King Edward's brother Nolan Struck, Prentiss Lewis, Charlie Jenkins, Johnny Littlejohn, Levon Lindsey, brothers "Lightnin'" and Little Charles Russell, Elmore James, Jr., Robert Robinson, Andrew "Bobo" Thomas, Tommy Lee Thompson, Bobby Rush, Z. Z. Hill, Little Milton, Dorothy Moore, Lee "Shot" Williams, Abdul Rasheed, Eddie Rasberry, Walter Lee "Big Daddy" Hood, J. T. Watkins, Roosevelt Robinson, Sr., George Jackson, Eddie Cotton, Jr., Sam Baker, Jr., Jesse Robinson, Bill Simpson, Louis "Gearshifter" Youngblood, Robert "Bull" Jackson, Greg "Fingers" Taylor, Willie (Dee) Dixon, Robert "The Duke" Tillman, Sweet Miss Coffy, Willie James Hatten, Billy "Soul" Bonds, Frank-O (Johnson), Tina Diamond, Dennis Fountain, Marvin Bradley, James Williams, Sugar Lou, and Debra K.

Lewis also rented out rooms above the Queen of Hearts to musicians including Sam Myers and Big Bad Smitty, and recalled that the home of bluesman Johnnie Temple (1905 to 1968), located behind the club, was a popular hangout for Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, and other musicians. The house was previously occupied by Temple's stepfather, guitarist Lucine "Slim" Duckett, who recorded in Jackson for the Okeh label in 1930. Tommy Johnson and Skip James were among other noted blues performers who stayed with the Duckett/Temple family at various houses in Jackson. After moving to Chicago in the 1930s Temple recorded extensively, scoring his biggest hit with the often-covered "Louise Louise Blues." He returned to Jackson in the late 1950s.

RABBIT FOOT MINSTRELS

507 Market Street, Port Gibson, Mississippi

During the first half of the 20th century, the African American entertainers of the Rabbit Foot Minstrels played a major role in spreading the blues via tours across the South. Founded in 1900, the “Foots” were headquartered in Port Gibson between 1918 and 1950 under owner F. S. Wolcott. Notable members included Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Ida Cox, Louis Jordan, and Rufus Thomas.

By the mid-1910s entertainers in tent shows were spreading the blues across the South, and one of most popular groups was the Port Gibson-based Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Minstrel shows presented a wide range of comedy routines, skits, and song-and-dance numbers, and always featured a marching band. In the 1910s they added blues to their existing repertoire of classical, ragtime, and popular music, playing it both instrumentally and in support of vaudeville-style female singers. Many performers later known for other styles of blues also spent time in minstrel troupes, including rhythm and blues pioneer Louis Jordan and Rufus Thomas, who worked as a comedian.

White performers including Dan Emmett and T. D. Rice pioneered blackface minstrelsy, the first distinctively American theatrical format, in the 1830s and 1840s. African Americans soon followed them, particularly following the Civil War, and, like their white counterparts, they “blackened up” with makeup and enacted caricatures of black life that many whites believed to be authentic. The shows, all initially operated by white managers, were enjoyed by both black and white audiences, and in the South seating was segregated. By the beginning of the 20th century, African Americans had begun organizing their own companies. Minstrel shows were often staged at large urban theaters, and in tandem with the growth of the railway system troupes began traveling to rural areas as well, staging their shows under canvas tents.

In 1900, Patrick Henry Chappelle, an African American from Florida, produced a musical comedy called “A Rabbit’s Foot,” and by 1902 his Rabbit’s Foot Company was touring as a tent show, though the popular attraction was billed as “too good for a tent.” Following Chappelle’s death in 1911, the company was taken over by F. S. (Fred Swift) Wolcott, a white entrepreneur from Michigan who had been running a small minstrel company. In the spring of 1918 Wolcott moved the company’s headquarters to Port Gibson, where troupe members stayed in the winter, either in train cars or in the homes of locals, and rehearsed on a covered stage at Wolcott’s home. The show remained popular through the 1940s, and records suggest that its final performances were in 1959.

Among the ranks of the Rabbit Foot Minstrels were many blues singers and musicians who at some point lived in Mississippi, including Big Joe Williams, Sid Hemphill, Willie Nix, Maxwell Street Jimmy, Jim Jackson, Bogus Ben Covington, Dwight “Gatemouth” Moore, Johnny “Daddy Stovepipe” Watson, and trombonist Leon “Pee Wee” Whittaker.

RIVERSIDE HOTEL

615 Sunflower Avenue, Clarksdale, Mississippi

Since 1944 the Riverside Hotel has provided lodging for traveling musicians. It was home to some, including Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2, Ike Turner, and Robert Nighthawk. Before that, the building served African Americans of the Delta as the G.T. Thomas Hospital. Blues singer Bessie Smith died here in 1937 from injuries sustained in a car accident while traveling to Clarksdale for a performance.

On the morning of September 26, 1937, Bessie Smith, "the empress of the blues," died here at the G.T. Thomas Afro American Hospital following an automobile accident on Highway 61 just outside of Clarksdale. Smith, known for her powerful voice and the raw emotion of her delivery, was the biggest star of the blues in the 1920s, and was in the process of making a comeback.

Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in the early 1890s, Smith lost both parents by the time she was nine, and she and her older sister were left caring for nine younger children. Smith and her brother Andrew began performing on the streets to earn money. She began her professional career in 1912 as a dancer with the Moses Stokes touring company, which also included Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (1886-1939), later dubbed the "mother of the blues." Rainey served as a mentor to Smith, who soon became an established performer on the African-American vaudeville circuit.

In 1923 Bessie Smith made her first recording for the Columbia label, "Downhearted Blues / Gulf Coast Blues." The single was the first in a string of hits, including "St. Louis Blues," and Smith soon became the highest paid African-American performer of the 1920s. At the time of her fatal accident, Smith was in her Packard on her way from Memphis to Clarksdale to spend the night. She was to appear the following day with the traveling show Broadway Rastus in the community of Darling, about 20 miles northeast of here. It was widely rumored that Smith's death resulted from her being refused admission to Clarksdale's "white" hospital, but the facts suggest otherwise. The reality was that during that time local ambulance drivers would not have considered taking an African-American patient to a "white" hospital in the first place.

Like hospitals, housing accommodations were segregated prior to the 1970s, and some hotels catered to touring musicians. In 1944 the building was opened as the Riverside Hotel, and regular guests in the '40s and '50s included local blues artists Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2, Robert Nighthawk, Raymond Hill, Ike Turner, Joe Willie Wilkins, James "Peck" Curtis, Johnny O'Neal, and Robert "Dudlow" Taylor. Another notable guest in the hotel was John F. Kennedy, Jr., who stayed here in 1991.

ROBERT JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE

138 North Ragsdale Road, Hazlehurst, Mississippi

The legendary bluesman Robert Johnson was born on the northern outskirts of Hazlehurst to Julia Majors and Noah Johnson, on May 8, 1911 (or possibly 1912). Johnson lived in Tunica County and in Memphis as a child, but in the early 1930s he returned for a stay in the Hazlehurst area, where he honed his skills playing with local blues guitarist Ike Zinnerman.

Robert Johnson whose body of twenty-nine recordings from 1936 to 37 is widely regarded as an artistic high point of the blues, had a close connection to the Hazlehurst area. He was born here, probably in the Damascus community north of town, later returned regularly to perform, and fathered his only known child with a local woman. Johnson's mother, Julia Majors, was originally from Hazlehurst, and after separating from her first husband, Hazlehurst native Charles Dodds, she had a child with Noah Johnson, a local sawmill worker. Robert Johnson's year of birth is frequently reported as 1911, but the ages given on two marriage licenses, school records, and his death certificate suggest birthdates ranging from 1907 to 1912. Since he is not listed in the 1910 census among his mother's children, 1911 or 1912 are more likely.

Shortly after Johnson's birth his mother moved to the Delta and sent Robert to live in Memphis with the family of Dodds, who had changed his last name to Spencer. In the late 1910s Johnson moved to the Abbey and Leatherman plantation near Robinsonville to live with his mother and her new husband, Dusty Willis. Some confusion about the details of Johnson's life has stemmed from his using the names Johnson, Dodds, Spencer, and Willis. He began actively performing music while in his teens, and around 1930 came to the attention of local blues powerhouse Son House, who later recalled that at the time Johnson could only make a "racket" on the guitar. In the early '30s Johnson returned to the Hazlehurst area, where he studied with guitarist Ike Zinnerman of Beauregard, ten miles south of Hazlehurst. Upon Johnson's return to the Delta, House recalled that Johnson's skills had increased markedly. In Martinsville, just south of Hazlehurst, Johnson had a romantic relationship with Virgie Mae Cain, resulting in the birth of Claud Johnson on December 12, 1931. In 1998 the Chancery Court of Leflore County determined that Claud Johnson was Robert Johnson's son and the legal heir to his considerable estate. He subsequently founded the Robert Johnson Blues Foundation, oriented toward arts education.

In May of 1931 Robert married a Martinsville woman, Callie Craft, and gave a Memphis address when he filed for the license. Johnson traveled widely, but continued to visit the Hazlehurst area, where he stayed with his aunt, Clara Majors Rice. Her son Howard recalled that, in addition to guitar, Johnson played piano and pump organ. Among the musicians who played with Johnson during these years was guitarist Houston Stackhouse, who recalled performing with him at the Frank Ford plantation outside of Crystal Springs. Johnson died in Greenwood on August 16, 1938.

ROBERT JOHNSON GRAVESITE

Money Road (County Road 518), Greenwood, Mississippi

A seminal figure in the history of the Delta blues, Robert Johnson (1911 to 1938) synthesized the music of Delta blues pioneers such as Son House with outside traditions. He in turn influenced artists such as Muddy Waters and Elmore James. Johnson's compositions, notable for their poetic qualities, include the standards "Sweet Home Chicago" and "Dust My Broom." Johnson's mysterious life and early death continue to fascinate modern fans. He is thought to be buried in this graveyard.

One of the most famous and legendary Delta blues musicians is Robert Johnson. Although he recorded only twenty nine songs at two recording sessions in 1936 and 1937, his work has been included in the repertoires of countless blues and rock musicians since. Johnson's songs "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Cross Road Blues," "Love in Vain Blues," "Traveling Riverside Blues" and "Sweet Home Chicago" became well known via the recordings of Elmore James, Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and many others.

Johnson was born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, but by 1920 he was living near Robinsonville, just south of Memphis. In the late 1920s, he took up the guitar and was learning to play from Willie Brown, Charley Patton, and Son House. By 1931, Johnson had returned to the Hazlehurst area and begun studying with local bluesman Ike Zinnerman, generally accepted by scholars as the most important influence on Johnson and his revolutionary, modern style.

From 1933 on, Johnson traveled around the Delta and to other parts of the country including Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and even Canada. Johnson went from one jook to another, never settling in one place, although he did have a home in Helena, Arkansas, for a time. Late in 1938, impresario John Hammond planned to present Johnson as part of the "From Spirituals to Swing" concert at Carnegie Hall, an appearance that would have undoubtedly made him an international star. Unfortunately, Johnson died before that event. He was allegedly poisoned by the angry husband of a woman he was seeing. He died on Star of the West plantation just south of this site on August 16 and was buried here the following day.

Some believe the myth that Johnson sold his soul in exchange for remarkable guitar-playing skills that would make him famous, and the story of his fateful meeting with the devil at a rural crossroads is an enduring blues theme. Bluesman Son House stated, "He sold his soul to play like that," but early blues songs are full of references to witchcraft and the devil, with Johnson's lyrics no exception. His songs "Hell-Hound on My Trail" and "Me and the Devil Blues," helped to perpetuate the legend.

ROBERT NIGHTHAWK

649 Second Street, Friars Point, Mississippi

Robert Nighthawk (1909 to 1967) was one of the foremost blues guitarists of his era. Although he rarely stayed long in one town, he called Friars Point home at various times from the 1920s to the 1960s. In a 1940 recording, he sang of “going back to Friars Point, down in sweet old Dixie Land.” During Nighthawk’s time, blues musicians (including the legendary Robert Johnson) played at local juke joints and house parties and in front of stores, such as Hirsberg’s at this site.

Robert Nighthawk was one of the Delta’s most famous blues artists during the 1940s and ‘50s, known for his radio broadcasts on KFFA in Helena, Arkansas, and WROX in Clarksdale, as well as for his recordings and his wide-ranging travels. Nighthawk, it seemed, was always in the process of changing his address, his marital status, or his name. Born Robert Lee McCollum on November 30, 1909, in Phillips County, Arkansas, he played harmonica before he learned guitar from Houston Stackhouse on a farm in Murphy Bayou, Mississippi, in 1931. On his first records, including “Prowling Nighthawk” in 1937, he was billed as Robert Lee McCoy; among several other recording monikers, the most appropriate was Rambling Bob. He lived in Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, Florida, and elsewhere, in between periodic returns to the Delta.

Nighthawk was famed for his cool, composed vocal style and his influential slide guitar sound, which he achieved by sliding a piece of brass pipe along the guitar frets. His best known records included “Annie Lee Blues,” “Black Angel Blues,” “The Moon is Rising,” and “Crying Won’t Help You.” B.B. King once named Nighthawk as one of his ten favorite guitarists. Nighthawk’s renown has spread internationally since his death in Helena on November 5, 1967. He was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in 1983, and a powerful album released in 1980, *Robert Nighthawk: Live on Maxwell Street 1964*, was named one of the ten best rock ‘n’ roll albums of the year by critic Greil Marcus.

Among Nighthawk’s several marriages, at least one was in Friars Point, where he worked on John McKee’s plantation. While most local blues activity was in plantation juke joints or in the New Town area on the southern end of Friars Point, sometimes merchants hired musicians to play inside or in front of their downtown stores to attract potential customers; at other times, performers would just set up outside and play for tips. But, according to drugstore owner Robert Hirsberg, merchants sometimes complained when crowds were so thick that no one could get in—or out of—the stores. Muddy Waters recalled Robert Johnson drawing a huge crowd for a street corner performance in the 1930s, when Friars Point was a bustling center of river commerce and a weekend shopping mecca for residents of the countryside. Johnson also reportedly played at a local barrelhouse called the Blue and White Club, and on a 1937 recording, he sang, “Just come on back to Friars Point, mama, and barrelhouse all night long.” African American performers based in Friars Point who later made records also included the Sons of Wonder gospel group and blues harmonica players Robert Diggs and Blind Mississippi Morris Cummings.

ROEBUCK "POPS" STAPLES

614 Summit Street, Winona, Mississippi

Roebuck "Pops" Staples, one of the foremost figures in American gospel music as a singer, guitarist, and patriarch of the Staple Singers family group, was born on a farm near Winona on December 28, 1914. Staples began playing blues as a youngster in the Delta, but by the time he left for Chicago in 1936 he had embarked on a gospel singing career. He and the Staple Singers later enjoyed crossover success in the rhythm & blues and pop fields. Staples died on December 19, 2000.

Staples fused old-time religion and the blues with an activist commitment to peace, equality, and brotherhood to create inspirational "message songs" that transcended the traditional boundaries of gospel music. Under his guidance, the Staple Singers not only earned the title "the first family of gospel music," but also developed followings among blues, soul, folk, rock, and jazz audiences. Staples traced his style back to the hymns and spirituals he learned from his grandfather and the blues he heard in Mississippi. Roebuck and his older brother Sears, the last two of fourteen Staples children, were named after the Chicago mail order company that numbered many rural African Americans among its millions of customers. Another Staples brother, David, played blues guitar before becoming a preacher, and a famous relative born years later was Oprah Winfrey, whose great-grandmother was Roebuck's aunt, Ella Staples. The Staples lived around Mayfield and Kilmichael until they moved to Dr. Joseph David Swinney's plantation west of Minter City (c. 1918) and then to Will Dockery's near Drew (c. 1923). Inspired by Delta blues kingpin Charley Patton, a Dockery resident, and Howlin' Wolf, who often performed in Drew, Staples took up guitar and began frequenting local juke house parties, but also sang in church and at local gospel gatherings, sometimes with the Golden Trumpets in Carroll and Montgomery counties. Although he chose to stay on the gospel path, he remained a lifelong blues fan and was a friend to many blues singers, from Wolf and Muddy Waters to Albert and B. B. King.

Staples' children Cleotha and Pervis were born at Dockery, followed by Yvonne, Mavis, and Cynthia after the family moved to Chicago. Staples put the guitar aside for several years while he worked as a laborer to support his brood, although he sang locally with the Trumpet Jubilees. Around 1948 he decided to put together a family group, and soon the Staple Singers were performing at area churches and gospel shows. Their 1956 recording of "Uncloudy Day" brought them widespread attention, both within and outside the gospel world. Among their many later hits, most of them featuring Mavis Staples' powerful lead vocals, were "I'll Take You There," "Respect Yourself," and "Let's Do It Again." Pops Staples professed not to be a blues singer, but he did collaborate with guitarists Albert King and Steve Cropper on the Stax album *Jammed Together*, and he won a Grammy in the Contemporary Blues category in 1994 for his final CD, *Father Father*. "It's just my way of playing," he explained. "I can't get away from it – it's gonna have a little touch of blues." The Rhythm & Blues Foundation honored Staples with a Pioneer Award in 1992, and in 1998 he was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts. The Staple Singers were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1999.

ROOTS OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

614 Mobile Street, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Rock and roll is rooted in the blues of Mississippi. The Mississippi Jook Band (brothers Roosevelt and Uaroy Graves and pianist Cooney Vaughan) earned a niche in the annals of rock after they recorded in Hattiesburg in 1936, nearly two decades before rock and roll exploded in the 1950s. The *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* noted that their blues recordings “featured fully formed rock and roll guitar riffs and a stomping rock and roll beat.”

Hattiesburg was the site of a historic series of recording sessions by Mississippi blues, gospel, and country performers in July of 1936, including Roosevelt and Uaroy Graves (both as a gospel duo and as part of the Mississippi Jook Band with Cooney Vaughn), the Edgewater Crows, the Gold Star Quartette, Rev. R. H. Taylor, the Laurel Firemen's Quartette, the Steelman Sisters, the Madden Community Band, Sunny Spencer and Boy Pugh, Zeke Bingham and Monroe Chapman, Johnson and Lee, Rajah Evans (Jaybird), Benjamin Scott, and Shep and Cooney. Jackson talent scout H. C. Speir told historian Gayle Dean Wardlow that he and recording director W. R. Calaway of the American and Brunswick record corporations set up a temporary studio upstairs in the Hotel Hattiesburg at Mobile and Pine streets. Most of the recordings, however, were never released, and the metal master discs were either scrapped or donated to the recycling effort in World War II. Among the unissued numbers was the Edgewater Crows' “Mobile Street Stomp,” named in tribute to the historic African American business and entertainment district where many of the musicians lived and worked. In later years several blues and gospel record labels were headquartered on or near Mobile Street.

Only three 78 rpm blues records from the 1936 sessions were issued: one by the Edgewater Crows and two by the Mississippi Jook Band. “Barbecue Bust” and “Dangerous Woman” were cited on the first page of the chapter “Rock Begins” in the *1980 Rolling Stone Illustrated History* by critic Robert Palmer, who wrote that the “rocking and reeling” style of gospel exemplified by the Graves brothers “was beginning to influence secular music” at a time when “rock prototypes were already abundant” in the rural South. Wardlow later suggested that an earlier Graves recording, “Crazy About My Baby” from 1929, “could be considered the first rock 'n' roll recording.” Roosevelt Graves (1909 to 1962), who was blind, was born in Summerland, near Laurel. He and his brother traveled around Mississippi playing street corners and churches. In the 1930 census listings they were in Tunica; Speir brought them from McComb to record in Hattiesburg; and Roosevelt spent his final years in Gulfport.

Cooney Vaughn (sometimes spelled Vaughns or Vaughan) also recorded as a member of the duo Shep and Cooney and was reputed by some to be the best pianist in Mississippi during an era when Hattiesburg was known as a hot spot for piano players. Little Brother Montgomery, Gus Perryman, and many others pounded the keys here. Vaughn at one time resided at 515 7th Street, around the corner from the birthplace of his cousin, Blind John Davis, at 707 Whitney Street. (Both sites are just one block northeast of this marker.) Davis became one of Chicago's most prolific blues session pianists and toured Europe regularly.

ROSEDALE

Railroad Avenue and Brown Street, Rosedale, Mississippi

Rosedale was immortalized in Robert Johnson's 1937 recording "Traveling Riverside Blues." In 1968, Eric Clapton's group Cream incorporated the verse "Goin' dow to Rosedale" into their version of Johnson's "Cross Road Blues." Although Johnson's original 1936 version of this song did not mention Rosedale, the town has since become associated with the legend of a bluesman selling his soul to the devil at the crossroads.

Rosedale inspired work by prominent blues artists, including Robert Johnson. Johnson (1911 to 1938), though among the most influential of all blues musicians, enjoyed limited commercial success as a recording artist during his lifetime. "Traveling Riverside Blues," from his final session in Dallas, was not even released until twenty-three years after his death, on his landmark 1961 Columbia LP *King of the Delta Blues*. With that album Johnson's powerful and poetic blues was introduced to a new generation, including many rock bands who recorded his songs.

Johnson's original lyrics for "Riverside Blues" traced the route of the Riverside Division of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad (Y&MV), which ran from Friars Point south to Rosedale, Riverside Junction, and other stops. The Y&MV continued to Vicksburg to the south and Memphis to the north. Extolling his diversions "on the Riverside," Johnson sang, "I got womens in Vicksburg, clean on into Tennessee." Of all of the towns he mentioned, only Rosedale made it into the band Cream's "Crossroads" or Led Zeppelin's version of "Traveling Riverside Blues" (1969). Sexual metaphors were prominent in many blues lyrics, including one that Led Zeppelin reworked from Johnson's "Traveling Riverside Blues" into "The Lemon Song" in 1969. The story of Johnson's alleged deal with the devil eventually led crossroads seekers to Rosedale, where the legend has been promoted at local venues and festivals.

Blues activity in Rosedale historically revolved around the juke joints of Bruce Street, which date to Johnson's era and earlier. The town, one of two seats of Bolivar County, was at its most active in the 1930s, before the county's population began to decline. Delta blues pioneer Charley Patton (1891 to 1934) spent much of his time in Bolivar County and was the first to sing about Rosedale in his 1929 recording "High Water Everywhere," a dramatic account of the 1927 Mississippi River flood ("The water done rose, it rose most everywhere... I would go down to Rosedale but they tell me it's water there.")

Musicians born in Rosedale include blues singer-pianist Dennis Binder (born 1928), who began recording in the 1950s, and Isaac "Redd" Holt (born 1932), a renowned jazz drummer in Chicago.

RUBIN LACY

716 Second Street, Pelahatchie, Mississippi

Rubin Lacy was one of the most talented and influential artists in Mississippi blues during his short career as a secular performer. The grandson of a minister, Lacy was born in Pelahatchie on January 2, 1901. He was a well-known blues performer in the Jackson area and the Delta until 1932, when he put his guitar down and became a preacher. In the 1950s he moved to California, where he died on November 14, 1969. He is buried in Pelahatchie.

Although Rubin “Rube” Lacy recorded only a handful of blues songs, he played an important role in the formative years of Mississippi blues. Lacy learned to play the guitar and mandolin by emulating George “Crow Jane” Hendrix, a multi-instrumentalist who led a string band in Pelahatchie. As a young man Lacy traveled widely, and among his experiences were meeting country music pioneer Jimmie Rodgers while both were railway workers, and working in Chicago with an uncle from Germany who taught Lacy to speak German fluently. After moving back to the Jackson area, where he became known as the “blues king,” Lacy played in an elite circle that included Son Spand, Ishmon Bracey, Tommy Johnson, Charlie McCoy, and Walter Vinson. He later moved to the Delta, where he formed his own group, performed with Charley Patton, and inspired artists including Son House, Tommy McClennan, and Honeyboy Edwards.

Lacy made four recordings for Columbia Records at a session in Memphis in December 1927, but none were released. The following March he traveled to Chicago, where he recorded two songs for the Paramount label, “Mississippi Jail House Groan” and “Ham Hound Crave,” both of which he learned from Hendrix. Accompanying Lacy on the trip was music talent agent Ralph Lembo of Itta Bena, who contributed a spoken part to “Ham Hound Crave.” The two Paramount tracks, the only blues recordings by Lacy that were ever released, are considered such prime examples of Mississippi blues that both songs have appeared on numerous reissue CDs and LPs around the world.

Following a train-related injury in 1932 Lacy decided to join the ministry, a path followed at times by fellow Mississippi bluesmen of his generation, including House, Skip James, Ishmon Bracey, Skip James, and Robert Wilkins. Lacy preached in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri before relocating to California. In 1966 blues scholar David Evans located Lacy in Ridgecrest, California, and recorded him preaching and performing gospel songs together with members of his congregation. Although Lacy would no longer perform blues, he remained proud of his early recordings and suggested to Evans that the religiously devout feel the blues “quicker than a sinner do, ‘cause the average sinner ain’t got nothing to worry about.” Lacy was one of a number of blues performers born in Rankin County. Others included Luther and Percy Huff, Shirley Griffith, John Henry “Bubba” Brown, Tommy Lee Thompson, Othar Turner, Elmore James, Jessie “Little Howlin’ Wolf” Sanders, and Pelahatchie native Lefty “Leroy” Bates. Griffith, Bates, and some of Lacy’s children later moved to Indianapolis, Indiana. Note: Although Lacy's death certificate gave Pelahatchie as his burial site, we have since learned from his son John L. Lacy that he was buried in Bakersfield, California.

RUBY'S NITE SPOT

203 McGee Street, Leland, Mississippi

Ruby's Nite Spot, operated at this site by Ruby Edwards, was one of the most prominent blues clubs in the Delta during the 1940s and '50s. Edwards booked nationally known acts such as T-Bone Walker, Little Walter, and Little Richard, newcomers Ike Turner and Little Milton, and down-home Delta bluesmen Son Thomas and Eddie Cusic, among many others. Patrons here could dine, drink, dance, and gamble into the wee hours of the morning, long after clubs in nearby Greenville and Indianola had closed.

Ruby's Nite Spot occupied a unique position among Delta nightclubs not only because of its full and varied slate of blues entertainment but also because of owner Ruby Edwards' renowned business acumen. Edwards, always determined to please her customers, took full advantage of Leland's "wide open" policy that allowed gambling extravaganzas and late-hour activities that few towns in Mississippi could match. Gamblers with suitcases full of cash traveled to Leland from all over the South for all-day, all-night "skin balls" that Edwards operated next to the club, often lasting for days at a time. Payoffs to the local sheriff ensured that Edwards could send her daughter Sue or other "runners" across the state line to return with liquor that was illegal during Mississippi's extended era of prohibition. Crowds of hungry revelers dined on chicken, fish, hamburgers, and hot dogs and danced to the music of the country's top names in blues as well as an impressive array of local and regional musicians. Ready to market anything that might sell, Edwards made tamales at one time and brewed her own corn liquor at another.

Ruby Edwards, born May 20, 1910, came to Leland from Brandon, Mississippi, with her mother shortly before the 1927 flood. Resolved to go into business for herself, she had opened Ruby's Nite Spot by World War II. Her children, Terry Keese, Harold Hall, Sue Carol Hall, and Jimetta Thornton, later worked at the club. Among the entertainers recalled as performing at Ruby's are Ray Charles, Bobby Bland, Junior Parker, B. B. King, Jimmie Lunceford, Big Joe Turner, Gate-mouth Brown, Gate-mouth Moore, Arthur Prysock, Percy Mayfield, Lowell Fulson, Joe and Jimmy Liggins, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Ted Taylor, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm (an all-female band that originated at Piney Woods), Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Honeyboy Edwards, and the bands of the Silas Green and Rabbit Foot minstrel shows. To draw crowds, Ruby's often offered free admission to dances when local bands were performing. Little Milton and Tyrone Davis would both take the stage alone, without backup bands, to practice their acts in the embryonic stages of their careers. Once Milton formed a band, he became a regular at the club, as did Ike Turner and his Kings of Rhythm from Clarksdale and the Red Tops from Vicksburg. The local blues roster also included Joe Cooper, Smokey Wilson, Lil' Bill Wallace, Charlie Booker, Eddie Shaw, L. V. Banks, and Jesse "Cleanhead" Love.

In the mid-1950s Edwards took over the Club Ebony in Indianola, where her daughter Sue met her husband-to-be, B. B. King. Edwards' sons then operated her Leland enterprises, including Ruby's and the smaller Playhouse nearby. In later years Ruby Edwards ran a grocery store until she retired in the 1970s. She died on New Year's Day of 2001.

Ruby's remained at the same location over the years, but its address changed from 203 West 3rd Street to 203 McGee when the city switched the names of the streets. Many performers, including Milton, Cusic, Son Thomas, Willie Foster, and Tyrone Davis have lived in this section of Leland over the years.

SAM CHATMON AND THE HOLLANDALE BLUES

Simmons Street and West Washington Street, Hollandale, Mississippi

Sam Chatmon (circa 1899 to 1983), a celebrated singer and guitarist who spent most of his life in Hollandale, sometimes performed with his brothers in a renowned family string band billed as the Mississippi Sheiks. He embarked on a new solo career after coming out of musical retirement in the 1960s. Many local musicians have performed here on Simmons Street, known as “the Blue Front,” once one of the most vibrant centers of blues activity in the Delta.

Hollandale Blues history dates back at least to the 1920s, when the Mississippi Sheiks, Sam Chatmon, Bo Chatmon (aka Bo Carter), Eugene Powell, Robert Nighthawk, and Houston Stackhouse performed at local drug stores, cafes, and other businesses, in addition to jukehouse parties and dances on nearby plantations. Most of the Mississippi Sheiks, a popular string band known for their hit recording “Sitting on Top of the World” (1930), were members of the Chatmon family, several of whom moved from their native Hinds County to the Hollandale area around 1928 and worked here as cotton farmers as well as musicians. In later years Sam Chatmon moved into town and took a job as a night watchman, while his brother Bo settled in Anguilla.

After blues enthusiasts began to seek Sam out in the 1960s, he traveled to play concerts and festivals around the country, most often in the San Diego area, and recorded several albums including *Hollandale Blues* and *The Mississippi Sheik*. He grew a long beard, as his fiddle-playing father had done, and endeared himself to new audiences who were entertained by his risqué double-entendre songs. In 2009 the city of Hollandale purchased Chatmon’s house at 818 Sherman Street to move it here to “Blue Front,” an area once famed for blues, liquor, and gambling. Chatmon sang about Blue Front in his song “Hollandale Blues,” but told friends he preferred less rowdy surroundings.

Author Kathy Starr, whose grandmother operated the Fair Deal café on Blue Front, wrote in *The Soul of Southern Cooking*: “Blue Front was a string of little cafes where everybody gathered on the weekend. It was the only place blacks had to go, to get rid of the blues after a week’s hard work in the cotton fields. Everybody lived for Saturday night to go to Blue Front. . . . if you wanted a half-pint or a pint of whiskey or corn liquor, you could get it at Fair Deal because Grandmama and the chief of police had an ‘understanding.’ . . . The Seabirds (Seeburg juke boxes) would be jammin’ all up and down Blue Front with Howlin’ Wolf, Muddy Waters, and B. B. King. Sometimes they would be there in person over at the Day and Night Café. The great blues singer Sam Chatman [sic] came to Fair Deal often. People danced, ate, drank, and partied till the break of day. Saturday night without a fight was not known.”

Among other former Hollandale area residents, Eddie “Guitar Slim” Jones went on to the greatest fame in the 1950s after moving to New Orleans. Others include bluesmen William Warren, Willie Harris, Mott Willis, J. D. Short, James Earl “Blue” Franklin, and Joseph C. Moore (“J. C. Rico”); Eugene Powell’s wife Mississippi Matilda; the Buckhanna (Buchanan) Brothers string band; and soul singer Ruby Stackhouse, better known as Ruby Andrews.

SAM COOKE

357 Issaquena, Clarksdale, Mississippi

The golden voice of Sam Cooke thrilled and enchanted millions of listeners on the hit recordings “You Send Me,” “Shake,” “A Change is Gonna Come,” “Chain Gang,” and many more. Cooke’s captivating blend of gospel, blues, pop, and rhythm & blues made him a pioneer of the genre that became known as soul music in the 1960s. Cooke was born in Clarksdale on January 22, 1931. His family resided at 2303 7th Street until they moved to Chicago in 1933.

Cooke, one of America’s most popular and charismatic singing idols, began his career with his brothers Charles and L. C. and sisters Hattie and Mary in a family gospel group, the Singing Children. Their father, Charles Cook, a preacher and Clarksdale oil mill laborer, brought his wife Annie and the five children to Chicago in 1933. Sam later sang with the Highway QC’s and developed a national following on the gospel circuit as a member of the renowned Soul Stirrers. In 1957 he made the controversial move to “cross over” from religious to secular music, adding an “e” to his surname to establish a new identity as a rhythm & blues and pop singer.

Cooke’s appeal transcended boundaries of race, age, and gender, and his musical sensibilities were equally diverse, ranging from ballads to teenage dance numbers. He recorded a number of songs in the blues vein, including “Little Red Rooster,” “Somebody Have Mercy,” “Summertime,” “Frankie and Johnny,” “Laughin’ and Clownin’,” and several Charles Brown tunes. Asked to name his favorite singers in a 1964 interview, Cooke replied: “Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker. Louis Armstrong and Pearl Bailey also have a strong feeling for the blues.” According to his brother L. C., Sam also liked B. B. King, Bobby Bland, and Junior Parker.

An avid reader and astute, independent-minded businessman, Cooke was one of the first African American recording artists to establish his own record label and publishing company. He also made civil rights headlines in 1961 when he refused to perform at a segregated concert at Ellis Auditorium in Memphis. Cooke was shot to death at a Los Angeles motel on December 11, 1964, under circumstances that continue to generate controversy. More than forty-four years after Cooke’s death, his prophetic “A Change is Gonna Come” was revived as an anthem of a new political era when Bettye LaVette and Jon Bon Jovi sang it at the inauguration celebration for the country’s first African American president, Barack Obama.

Although L. C. Cooke never became as famous as Sam, he also made his mark as a vocalist, and in fact crossed over from gospel music before Sam did. L. C. was born in Clarksdale on December 14, 1932. His R&B career began in 1956 as a singer with a Chicago vocal group, the Magnificents. The Cooke brothers were the first of a number of noted performers in the soul music field to emerge from the Clarksdale area. Others include Charles Wright (leader of the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, famed for “Express Yourself” and other hits), Sir Mack Rice (composer of “Respect Yourself” and “Mustang Sally”), Chicago veteran Otis Clay, southern soul recording stars O. B. Buchana, David Brinston, and Luther Lackey, and local favorite Josh “Razorblade” Stewart.

SCOTT RADIO SERVICE COMPANY

Corner of Gallatin and Capitol Street, Jackson, Mississippi

Scott Radio Service Company, located at 128 North Gallatin Street, just north of this site, was one of the first businesses in Mississippi to offer professional recording technology. The Jackson-based Trumpet record label used the Scott studio for sessions with blues legends Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller) and Elmore (Elmo) James, along with many other blues, gospel, and country performers, from 1950 to 1952. Owner Ivan M. Scott later moved the company to 601C West Capitol Street.

Mississippi is famed as a rich source of musical talent, but few artists were commercially recorded in the state prior to World War II. Recording technology was prohibitively expensive and most studios were located in northern cities, although companies sometimes sent teams south to set up equipment in hotel rooms or other facilities to record local artists. The Okeh label recorded in Jackson in 1930 and the American and Brunswick record corporations did sessions in Jackson in 1935 and Hattiesburg in 1936, but otherwise the only early blues recordings done in Mississippi were conducted by folklorists, including John A. and Alan Lomax, using bulky portable equipment.

In the wake of World War II dramatic technological, social, legal, and economic developments transformed the recording industry. Many new independent labels emerged, often catering to the new rhythm & blues and country & western markets, including Jackson's Trumpet Records, founded by Willard and Lillian McMurry. The label initially had to outsource the recording of artists, and held its first session in April of 1950 at local radio station WRBC, which like many other stations at the time had equipment for recording commercials and in-house programming. In November of that year Trumpet began recording country, gospel, and blues artists at Scott Radio Service Company, operated by Ivan M. Scott (1907-1986), a Florida native who came to Jackson in the 1930s. Scott, who worked at various times as an appliance repairman, Columbia Records representative, jukebox operator, WRBC radio engineer, and communications consultant, opened shop here with Ernest A. Bradley, Jr., under the name Radio Service Company around 1947. Scott, who soon became sole owner of the firm, recorded music on a disc cutting machine for the Trumpet sessions, although many recording studios were using tape by the early '50s.

Scott engineered more than seventy recordings for Trumpet, including the first releases by Elmore James ("Dust My Broom") and Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 ("Eyesight to the Blind"), as well as sides by bluesmen Big Joe Williams, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, Willie Love, Luther and Percy Huff, Earl Reed, Clayton Love, Bobo "Slim" Thomas, Lonnie Holmes, and Sherman Johnson. Prior to establishing their own Diamond Studio in 1954, the McMurrays also issued recordings made at radio stations including Hattiesburg's WFOR and Laurel's WLAU and at studios including Sam Phillips's Memphis Recording Service and Ammons Studio (later Delta Recording Company) in Jackson. Jimmie Ammons recorded a wide variety of music and issued records by blues artists Tommy Lee (Thompson), Little Milton Anderson, and Tabby Thomas on his Delta label.

SHAKE RAG

399 East Main Street, Tupelo, Mississippi

Shake Rag, located east of the old M&O (later GM&O) railway tracks and extending northward from Main Street, was one of several historic African American communities in Tupelo. By the 1920s blues and jazz flowed freely from performers at Shake Rag restaurants, cafes, and house parties, and later from jukeboxes, while the sounds of gospel music filled the churches. The neighborhood was leveled and its residents relocated during an urban renewal project initiated in the late 1960s.

Tupelo's blues legacy is perhaps most widely known for its influence on a young Elvis Presley, who lived adjacent to the African American neighborhoods of "Shake Rag" and "On the Hill." A local explanation for the origin of Shake Rag's name refers to people "shakin' their rags" while fleeing a fight. The term was also used to describe African American musical gatherings in the 1800s and early 1900s and may be related to Shake Rag's location next to the railway tracks; prior to regular timetables, passengers would signal for the engineer to stop a train by shaking a rag. Gambling and bootlegging were commonplace in Shake Rag and although outsiders often regarded the area as dangerous, former residents proudly recalled its churches, prosperous businesses, and strong sense of community, a quality highlighted in Charles "Wsir" Johnson's 2004 documentary about Shake Rag, *Blue Suede Shoes in the Hood*. Blues guitarists such as Willie C. Jones, Charlie Reese, "Tee-Toc," and Lonnie Williams played at Shake Rag house parties, on street corners, on a stage near the fairgrounds, and at the Robins Farm south of downtown, according to musicians who have stated that Elvis may have been especially swayed by the music of "Tee-Toc" or Williams.

Touring blues, jazz, and R&B acts performed elsewhere in town at more formal venues including the Henry Hampton Elks Lodge on Tolbert Street, the Dixie Belle Theater, the lounge at Vaughn's Motel on North Spring Street, and the armory at the fairgrounds (south of this marker). In the post-World War II era George "Bally" Smith, a multi-instrumentalist whose repertoire included big band jazz and rhythm & blues, led the most celebrated local band. His band members over the years included bassist Charles "Bo" Clanton, trumpeters Turner Bynum and Joe Baker, drummers James "Pinhead" Ashby and Steve Norwood, guitarists Willie "Shug" Ewing, Cliff Mallet, and "Guitar" Murphy, trombonist Fred Chambers, pianist Billy Ball, and saxophonists James Brown, Jerry Baker, Augustus Ashby, Pete Norwood, and Ben Branch, who directed the band at Carver High School. Bally also led the King Cole Trio-style group Three B's and a Bop, featuring Clanton, James Ashby, and vocalist Hattie Sue Helenstein. Bally's groups performed on radio stations WELO and WTUP, sometimes together with vocal group the Five Rockets, which included Sam Bell and Wayne Herbert, Sr.

Nap Hayes of Shake Rag was among the first Tupelo performers to record (in 1928 for Okeh Records). Other Tupelo area natives who have recorded blues, R&B, or gospel include Aaron and Marion Sparks, Benny Sharp, Willie Pooch, Lester and Willie Chambers of the Chambers Brothers, Riley (Richard) Riggins, Lee Williams of the Spiritual QCs, and Homemade Jamz Blues Band.

SON HOUSE

Old Highway 61 North, Robinsonville, Mississippi

Eddie James “Son” House (1902 to 1988) plumbs the emotional depth of the blues perhaps more than any other Delta blues artist. A preacher at times, a barrelhousing bluesman at others, House was fiercely torn between the sacred teachings of the church and the secular lure of the blues life. House, who lived in the Robinsonville-Lake Cormorant area in the 1930s and early '40s, was a major influence on both Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. Son House is regarded as one of the preeminent blues artists, but during his early career in the Delta, his renown was largely confined to local jukehouse audiences. He later attained international prominence during the 1960s “blues revival” through passionate, trance-like performances that highlighted his aggressive guitar style. He would occasionally rise from his chair to sing spirited acappella gospel songs.

House was born near Lyon in Coahoma County on March 21, 1902, or by some accounts years earlier. Through his association with Delta blues legend Charley Patton, House first recorded for the Paramount label in 1930, though sales were minimal in the Depression era. Like other Robinsonville-area blues artists, including Robert Johnson, Howlin’ Wolf, and Willie Brown, House performed mostly at weekend suppers and dances held at sharecroppers’ houses. Tunica County locals have recalled House living and working on the Harbert, Tate, and Cox plantations, though he preferred to sing or preach. When the spirit called, he would preach at various churches, only to resume his nightlife as a bluesman.

House was a tractor driver on the R. E. Neunlist plantation in 1941 when he was recorded for a Fisk University-Library of Congress study led by Alan Lomax and John Work the third. On September 3, they recorded House, Willie Brown, Fiddlin’ Joe Martin, and Leroy Williams at Clack Store, a commissary and train station that stood at this site. (A chugging locomotive can be heard on the recordings.) Despite problems with local authorities, Lomax later recalled, “Of all my times with the blues, this was the best one.” A second Library of Congress session in Robinsonville in 1942 would be House’s last recording in Mississippi.

In 1964 a group of blues aficionados, including Dick Waterman, drove to Robinsonville to look for House, only to learn he had long retired from music and had moved in 1943 to Rochester, New York. His subsequent “rediscovery” was reported in Newsweek, and Waterman would manage House’s comeback career, often booking him as the closing act at festivals. The most notable of the albums House recorded was the 1965 Columbia LP *Father of Folk Blues*. House performed little after the early 1970s, and from 1976 until his death on October 19, 1988, he lived in Detroit with his wife Evie, whom he had married in Robinsonville in 1934. He is buried in Detroit.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON

19 Gipson Avenue, Glendora, Mississippi

Sonny Boy Williamson (circa 1912 to 1965), one of the premier artists in blues history, was born on a Glendora plantation under the name Alex Miller. A colorful character and charismatic performer, he was widely known as “Rice” Miller or “Sonny Boy No. 2”—in deference to another bluesman who had recorded earlier as “Sonny Boy” Williamson. Miller’s mastery of the blues idiom resonated through all phases of his work as a singer, songwriter, and harmonica player.

Sonny Boy Williamson was perhaps the greatest harmonica player ever born in the Mississippi Delta and one of the most remarkable and poetic blues composers as well. He left an impressive musical legacy through his recordings of “Eyesight to the Blind,” “Help Me,” “Your Funeral and My Trial,” “Fattening Frogs for Snakes,” “Nine Below Zero,” “Mighty Long Time,” “Unseeing Eye,” and many others made for Trumpet Records in Jackson (1951 to 1954) and the Chess/Checker company in Chicago (1957 to 1964). He was also the first star of blues radio broadcasting in the South, famed for his live performances on the influential King Biscuit Time radio show out of Helena, Arkansas, which began in 1941. Williamson’s estimated birthdate of December 5, 1912, is based on census data and recollections of his sisters. The inscription on his grave-stone reads “Aleck Miller, Better Known as Willie ‘Sonny Boy’ Williamson, Born March 11, 1908.” A trickster who was often in trouble with the law, he also confounded authorities and interviewers by using various other names and birthdates. Williamson songs such as “Don’t Start Me Talkin’” and “Keep It To Yourself” reflected his guarded, suspicious nature, which may well have been influenced by a harsh childhood environment. He was born on a plantation owned by Selwyn Jones, who was called to task by Mississippi Governor Earl Brewer for mistreatment of African Americans in 1915; in earlier years at least a dozen lynchings had been reported in Tallahatchie County, including several in Glendora.

During his career, Williamson teamed with such legendary artists as Robert Johnson, Elmore James, Robert Lockwood, Jr., Muddy Waters, and Buddy Guy. In the 1960s he became somewhat of a celebrity in England, performing and recording with a young Eric Clapton and the Yardbirds, the Animals, and others. In 1965 Williamson made his way back to Glendora and stayed a few weeks with his cousin, Willie James Stewart. He performed at Stewart’s juke joint, the King Place, which stood at this site, according to Glendora mayor Johnny B. Thomas, also a cousin, who worked for Stewart. Williamson eventually returned to Helena, where he resumed playing on King Biscuit Time, and reportedly told his guitarist, Houston Stackhouse, that he had come home to die.

Stackhouse drove Sonny Boy back to Mississippi a few times so he could revisit the places of his youth and see friends and family one final time. After Williamson died in Helena on May 25, 1965, several tributes to him were recorded by artists in both the United States and England. He was elected to the Blues Hall of Fame in the first year of balloting, 1980. He is buried in Tutwiler.

SUMMERS HOTEL AND SUBWAY LOUNGE

619 West Pearl Street, Jackson, Mississippi

During the era of segregation, traveling African Americans had few options for lodging. In Jackson, many black musicians stayed at the Summers Hotel, established in 1944 by W.J. Summers. In 1966 Summers opened a club in the hotel basement that he called the Subway Lounge. The Subway was a regular jazz venue and offered popular late night blues shows from the mid-1980s until the hotel's demolition in 2004.

During the segregated 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the two main Jackson hotels open to African Americans were the Edward Lee Hotel on Church Street and the Summers Hotel. The Summers Hotel, originally the Maples, a rooming house for whites, stood here at 619 W. Pearl Street. The building was remodeled and renamed the Summers Hotel in 1943 after its purchase by W. J. Summers (1897 to 1977), a prominent African American businessman, who ran the hotel with his wife Elma. The hotel was popular among touring musicians, including James Brown, Hank Ballard, and Nat "King" Cole.

In 1966 Summers enlisted Jimmy King, vocalist, bandleader, and high school teacher, to run a newly constructed basement lounge, which King dubbed the Subway. In the '60s and '70s the Subway Lounge featured mostly jazz performers, including King, brothers Kermit, Jr., Sherrill, and Bernard Holly, and organist Levon Mitchell, as well as various touring or area groups.

In 1969 King left the Subway to start his own club but returned in 1986, when he and his wife Helen revived it as a late-night blues venue, with music starting at midnight. Guitarist Jesse Robinson led the initial house band, the Knee Deep Band, which was followed by the House Rockers, fronted by singers Levon Lindsey and Abdul Rasheed, and the King Edward (Antoine) Blues Band. Knee Deep Band vocalist Walter Lee "Big Daddy" Hood was billed as "500 Pounds of Blues." Other Jackson artists who performed at the Subway included Eddie Cotton, Jr., Bobby Rush, Patrice Moncell, Eddie Rasberry, Sam Myers, J. T. Watkins, Pat Brown, Dennis Fountain, Dwight Ross, Greg "Fingers" Taylor, Thomas "Snake" Johnson, Vasti Jackson, Bill Sampson, and the Juvenators.

In April 2002 director Robert Mugge filmed performances at the Subway Lounge for the documentary *Last of the Mississippi Jukes*, which was released in early 2003. The documentary addressed the Subway's history and its diverse clientele, as well as efforts to save the club despite the building's serious structural problems. The efforts failed, and the Subway closed following a final performance in April 2003. The building was demolished in 2004.

SUMMIT STREET

700 block of Summit Street, McComb, Mississippi

Summit Street was a thriving African American business district during the era of segregation, as well as a hotbed of musical activity. Blues, jazz, and rhythm & blues bands entertained at various nightclubs, cafes, and hotels, and many musicians lived nearby. In McComb and many other cities, commerce in areas such as Summit Street began to decline when much of the African American trade dispersed to other parts of town after the coming of integration in the 1960s.

Summit Street, a historic center of African American culture, entertainment, and politics, was once a dirt road lined with dozens of businesses, including several cafes and clubs that featured blues music. During McComb's turbulent 1960s, when bombs destroyed nearby homes and businesses, club owners who supported the civil rights movement were among those beaten and arrested. Four decades later, McComb elected a man who grew up on Summit Street, Zach Patterson, as its first African American mayor.

In the heyday of Summit Street, recalled local businessman Bennie Joseph, "People come from all over to McComb, from Chicago all the way to New Orleans, man. It was a wide open city. They had clubs, gambling, corn liquor, everything . . . Dancing, partying, drinking. Clubs, clubs, clubs . . ." The Harlem Nightingale, which later became the Elk Rest Club, and Brock's Mocombo Number 2 (formerly the Club Rockett) were McComb's primary venues for touring blues, R&B, and jazz acts. Ralph Bowsky operated the Nightingale, while Van Brock called his club the McCombo in honor of McComb, although the name was usually spelled Mocombo. As the primary stop on the "chitlin circuit" between Jackson and New Orleans, McComb drew national talent such as B. B. King, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins, Roy Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, Solomon Burke, Marvin Gaye, Little Milton, Bobby Rush, Archie Bell & the Drells, Lucky Millinder, Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Dave Bartholomew, Lloyd Price, Roy Milton, The Bar-Kays, Groove Holmes, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Redd Foxx, and McComb's most famous native, Bo Diddley. McComb also developed its own rich musical heritage, with Wakefield Coney, better known as "Big Moody," a longtime local blues favorite.

The McComb area's impressive musical roster also includes Vasti Jackson, Robert "The Duke" Tillman, Larry Addison, Randy Williams, Fread Eugene Martin (aka Little Freddie King) and his father, Jesse James Martin, Zebedee Lee, Brandy Norwood, Omar Kent Dykes, Steve Blailock, Charlie Braxton, Ric E. Bluez, Reverend Charlie Jackson, Bernard "Bunny" Williams, Pete Allen, Chainsaw Dupont, Johnny Gilmore, Robert Rembert, John Lee Allen ("Tater Boy"), vocal group singers Prentiss Barnes of the Moonglows and Robert "Squirrel" Lester of the Chi-Lites, and Leon "Pop" Williams, founder of the Williams Brothers gospel group. The area was also an active center for blues pianists in the 1920s and '30s, according to piano legend Little Brother Montgomery, and McComb reportedly was at one time the home of early blues and gospel recording artists King Solomon Hill (Joe Holmes), Cryin' Sam Collins, and the Graves brothers, Roosevelt and Uaroy.

SUNNYLAND SLIM AND QUITMAN COUNTY BLUES

8th Avenue and Darby, Lambert, Mississippi

Albert Luandrew, better known as Sunnyland Slim, who was born in Vance (c. 1906), was a central figure on the Chicago blues scene from the 1940s until his death in 1995. Other noted Chicago bluesmen with Quitman County roots included Snooky Pryor, Jimmy Rogers, and Earl Hooker, while county natives Big Jack Johnson, James "Super Chikan" Johnson, and Johnnie Billington achieved renown while living in Mississippi. Lambert's strip of juke joints on 8th Street was once a hub of blues activity.

Sunnyland Slim was regarded as a patriarch of the Chicago blues scene for decades, a position that stemmed from his various roles as a bandleader, label owner, gambling house operator, and active mentor to many younger artists. Sunnyland usually cited September 5, 1906 as his birth date, but when he registered for Social Security in Memphis in 1939 he claimed 1903. As a boy Sunnyland served as the organist at local churches, and in his mid-teens found work playing the organ behind silent films at a movie theater in nearby Lambert, a job that required knowledge of a wide range of music and improvisational ability. Around 1925 he moved to Memphis, where he played actively on Beale Street's bustling club and theatre scene, and accompanied blues stars including Ma Rainey and Blind Blake. Sunnyland arrived in Chicago in the early '40s, and early gigs included work at parties with harmonica great John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. He made his first solo recordings in 1947 for the Aristocrat label, using Muddy Waters as his guitarist; the same year he recorded as "Doctor Clayton's Buddy," paying tribute to a newly deceased mentor from whom Sunnyland borrowed his distinctive falsetto vocal technique.

Sunnyland, who died in Chicago on March 17, 1995, didn't have many big hits, but he recorded prolifically for multiple labels including his own Airway Records. One of the many artists whom he helped upon their arrival in Chicago was Lambert native James "Snooky" Pryor (1921-2006), a harmonica player who—like Sunnyland and Waters—was a pioneer in the new, electric sounds of post-WWII Chicago blues. Some of Pryor's first performances in Chicago were at the Maxwell Street market, where musicians serenaded shoppers. Other musicians with Quitman County roots who performed there were one-armed harmonica player Big John Wrencher, who lived in Sabino, and guitarist Maxwell Street Jimmy (Charles Thompson), a native of Vance.

Blues recording artists born in Quitman County include Earl Hooker (Vance), Big Jack Johnson (Lambert), James "Super Chikan" Johnson (Darling), and harmonica player Provine Hatch, Jr. (Sledge), who, as "Little Hatch," became a leading player in Kansas City, Missouri's down-home blues scene; prominent bluesmen Jimmy Rogers and Tony Hollins also lived in the county, and guitarist Fenton Robinson is buried in Marks. In 1999 Crowder native Johnnie Billington received a Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts for his work with blues education; his group J. B. and the Midnighters included two of his students from Lambert, brothers Harvell and Dionne Thomas. Marks native David Brinston became a leading artist in the soul-blues scene beginning in the early '90s, recording for labels including Ecko and Malaco.

THE BLUE ROOM

601 Clay Street, Vicksburg, Mississippi

One of the most storied night spots in the South, the Blue Room, which stood across the street at 602 Clay Street, was operated for more than thirty years by flamboyant owner Tom Wince. Ray Charles, Fats Domino, B. B. King, Dinah Washington, Louis Armstrong, and Little Milton were among the many stars who played here. In the 1940s and '50s Wince was the most important blues promoter in Mississippi, booking bands through a network of nightclubs and halls across the state and in Louisiana.

The Blue Room, a multi-purpose complex that included a ballroom, restaurant, gambling casino, guest rooms, and living quarters for owner Tom Wince, Jr., and some of his family, began as a one-room operation selling beer and Coca-Colas in 1937. Wince was born on July 11, 1910 (or 1909 according to Social Security files), in Oak Ridge, northeast of Vicksburg, the son of white plantation owner Tom Harris and Rosie Brown, an African American who lived on the plantation. When Brown married Tom Wince, Sr., her son became known as Tom Wince, Jr. The Winces sharecropped until the 1920s, when they moved to Vicksburg.

Wince, Jr., a hotel bellhop with a fourth grade education, became a wealthy man, a big spender known as "Fancy Tom" for his elegant attire. He had seven wives and fourteen children, most of whom worked at the Blue Room. An avid sports fan, he befriended Joe Louis and other famed athletes, as well the headliners of African American blues and jazz. Wince earned his own status as a celebrity, yet he was also remembered for his friendly greetings to anyone who entered his club, no matter what their stature in life. Wince, who had pockets specially tailored in his pants to hold his pistol, prided himself in providing a safe, courteous atmosphere for top-notch entertainment. B. B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, T-Bone Walker, and Muddy Waters were among his favorite artists, according to his son, Billy Wince, Sr. Among others who appeared at the Blue Room's upstairs ballroom, the Skyline, were Ruth Brown, Lionel Hampton, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Jackie Brenston, Erskine Hawkins, Cootie Williams, Joe Liggins, Roy Brown, Andy Kirk, Lucky Millinder, Charles Brown, and the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. Even when segregation was in force, whites attended when certain acts, especially Louis Armstrong, were booked here. Vicksburg's Red Tops were a regular attraction. Jivin' Jones' group from Vicksburg and the Sounds of Soul and Booker Wolf 's band from Jackson also appeared. Teens had their own nights in the Blue Spot room, while a gambling casino and guest rooms were in the back, and next door was the Blue Room Circle restaurant. Wince, who owned several smaller local businesses, also booked acts into many other venues, including Ruby's Nite Spot in Leland and New Club Desire in Canton.

Urban renewal brought an end to the Blue Room in 1972, but by 1974 Wince had opened the Barrel Club at 1021 Walnut Street. The Barrel Club was famed for its prayer room; religion was another of Wince's keen interests. Also a 33rd degree Mason and a ruler in the Black Elks (IBPOEW), Wince died on September 15, 1978. His tombstone in City Cemetery is adorned with a large star similar to the one above the entrance to the Blue Room.

THE GOLD COAST: 'CROSS THE RIVER
150 Crystal Lake Drive, Flowood, Mississippi

This area of Rankin County, formerly called East Jackson and later the Gold Coast, was a hotbed for gambling, bootleg liquor, and live music for several decades up through the 1960s. Blues, jazz, and soul performers, including touring national acts and locally based artists Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller), Sam Myers, Cadillac George Harris, and Sam Baker, Jr., worked at a strip of clubs along Fannin Road known to African Americans as “cross the river.”

Mississippi state law prohibited the sale of liquor from 1908 to 1966, but humorist Will Rogers purportedly observed, “Mississippians will vote dry as long they can stagger to the polls.” By the 1930s bootleggers had set up shop openly here on the “Gold Coast,” a name that likely derived from the area’s proximity to the Pearl River and the vast amounts of money that were made here from bootlegging, gambling, and other vices. The Gold Coast soon became notorious for its boisterous nightlife, frequent murders, and official corruption, but customers continued to stream in from considerably stricter Jackson. On occasion the Mississippi National Guard was brought in to shut down the area, albeit with only temporary success, and the day-to-day operations and fortunes of bootleggers and clubs depended largely on the whims of local sheriffs. Infamous bootleggers included G. W. “Big Red” Hydrick and Sam Heaney, a club owner who was killed in a 1946 shootout that also claimed the life of Rankin County constable Norris Overby.

Blues activity “cross the river” centered on Fannin Road, where dozens of venues ranging from elaborate clubs to informal juke joints were frequented and mostly owned by African Americans. Many businesses stayed open twenty-hours a day, seven days a week. By the 1940s many national blues and jazz acts were playing at the Blue Flame/Play House complex, run by Joe Catchings, and at the Rankin Auditorium behind the Stamps Brothers Hotel, operated by brothers Charlie, Clift, and Bill Stamps. The Auditorium advertised that its dance floor could accommodate three thousand people, and other reports noted that white patrons were provided balcony seating.

By the mid-‘50s local clubs including the Blue Flame, Rocket Lounge, the Heat Wave, the Last Chance, and the Gay Lady featured mostly local artists. Among these were Sam Myers, King Mose, Cadillac George Harris, brothers Charley and Sammie Lee Smith, Jimmy King, Jesse Robinson, Charles Fairley, Willie Silas, Bernard “Bunny” Williams, brothers Kermit, Jr., Bernard, and Sherrill Holly, brothers Curtis and J.T. Dykes, Milton Anderson, Booker Wolfe, Tommy Tate, Robert Broom, Charles Fairley, Joe Chapman, and Sam Baker, Jr., whose parents ran the Heat Wave.

In 1966 Mississippi became the last state in the union to end prohibition, and gave individual counties the choice of remaining “dry” or becoming “wet.” Ironically, Rankin County chose the former, while neighboring and more populous Hinds County chose the latter. With these decisions the rationale for the Gold Coast was gone, and the club scene and bootlegging operations came abruptly to a stop.

THE HI-HAT CLUB

209 Old Airport Road, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

The Hi-Hat Club, which was built at this site in the 1950s, was once an important stop on the “chitlin circuit” for African American blues and soul performers. B.B. King, James Brown, Otis Redding, Ike & Tina Turner, and many others played to packed houses here. Owner Milton Barnes (1915-2005), one of Mississippi’s most successful African American entrepreneurs, also owned Barnes Cleaners, the Hattiesburg Black Sox baseball team, and several other night spots in addition to his own contracting business.

The Hi-Hat Club flourished during the heyday of the “chitlin circuit,” when most of the touring venues for the nation’s top blues, R & B, and soul performers were large African American nightclubs and dance halls. The Hi-Hat, one of the largest clubs in Mississippi, often drew crowds of eight to nine hundred, sometimes in excess of a thousand. As economics and audiences changed, the role of clubs like the Hi-Hat declined as the bigger shows gravitated to auditoriums and arenas, and by 1994 the Hi-Hat had closed its doors.

Owner Milton Barnes started Barnes Cleaners in 1935, expanded his various enterprises over the years, and was honored for his many achievements by official proclamation of the State of Mississippi in 2001. Barnes opened the Embassy Club at this site in the 1940s and rebuilt it as the Hi-Hat after a 1957 fire. This area, known as Palmers Crossing, was then outside the city limits and thus subject to fewer restrictions than nightspots in town on Mobile Street, the center of much of Hattiesburg’s earlier blues activity. A number of other nightspots operated in Palmers Crossing over the years, including the Club Desire, Blue Flame Beer Parlor, Thelma’s Place, Club Manhattan, Dashiki, Aquarius, and the Elks (I.B.P.O.E.W.) Lodge. The Embassy competed with the Harlem Night Club, on Highway 11 South, to present big-name acts during the segregation era, but even then, certain acts—Fats Domino, in particular—attracted white audiences here, as did Ike & Tina Turner and B. B. King in later years. Guitarist Chick Willis also recalled carloads of white teenagers and college students parked outside the Hi-Hat vicariously enjoying the music.

Other performers at the Embassy or Hi-Hat included James Brown, Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, Al Green, Johnnie Taylor, Tyrone Davis, Albert King, Ray Charles, Rufus Thomas, Little Milton, Louis Armstrong, Louis Jordan, Big Joe Turner, Ruth Brown, Guitar Slim, Hank Ballard & the Midnighters, Charles Brown, Lowell Fulson, Joe Morris, Bobby “Blue” Bland, Junior Parker, Al “TNT” Braggs, Joe Simon, Z. Z. Hill, Joe Tex, Clarence Carter, Latimore, Solomon Burke, Ollie Nightingale, Shirley Brown, Otis Clay, O. V. Wright, Denise LaSalle, Artie “Blues Boy” White, Lynn White, Millie Jackson, Ronnie Lovejoy, the

Bar-Kays, Bobby Powell, L. C. Cooke, Southside Movement, and Candi Staton. Eddie Lee “Cozy” Corley and the Blue Gardenias, Terry Leggett and the Jewels of Swing, Jimmie Payton, and the Bogalusa-based Rhythm Aces were among the regional acts featured here. Milton Barnes also invested in several other clubs and cafes, including a Hi-Hat Club in Gulfport and the Crown Club and Hut Drive-In in Laurel.

THE McCOY BROTHERS

Town Square, Raymond, Mississippi

Joe McCoy and his brother Charlie McCoy, both born on a farm near Raymond, performed and recorded widely during the pre-World War II era, but their most important legacy may rest with the lasting fame of songs they wrote or cowrote. These include "Corrine Corrina," which became a folk music standard, "When the Levee Breaks," which was covered by Led Zeppelin, and "Why Don't You Do Right," a hit for both blues singer Lil Green and pop star Peggy Lee.

Joe and Charlie McCoy Blues historians know little about the formative years of brothers Joe and Charlie McCoy, but their extensive recorded legacy from the late '20s to the mid-'40s attests to their considerable instrumental, vocal and songwriting skills, as well as to their great ability to adapt to changing musical trends. Joe Wilbur McCoy was born May 11, 1905; Charlie was born May 26, 1909, according to medical records, but other sources place his birth date at c. 1911. In the 1900 census their parents, Patrick and Alice McCoy, were living near Bolton, in the same area as blues pioneers Charley Patton, Henry Sloan, and future members of the Mississippi Sheiks from the Chatmon (or Chatman) family.

The McCoy brothers were both active in Jackson blues circles, but by the late '20s Joe moved to Memphis and soon thereafter to Chicago. In February 1928 Charlie made his debut recordings playing guitar behind Jackson area musicians Ishmon Bracey and Tommy Johnson. Charlie also recorded as a mandolinist in string bands billed as the Jackson Blue Boys, the Mississippi Blacksnakes, and the Mississippi Mud Steppers. Charlie and Bo Chatmon (later known as Bo Carter) recorded the first version of "Corrine Corrina" in December 1928. An astonishing range of artists later covered the song, including Bob Wills, Art Tatum, Bing Crosby, Muddy Waters, Big Joe Turner, Dean Martin, and Bob Dylan. In the early '30s Charlie established himself in Chicago as an in-demand studio musician. Joe McCoy's records were all released under pseudonyms, including Hamfat Ham, Georgia Pine Boy, Mississippi Mudder, and Mud Dauber Joe. McCoy, who also served as a preacher at times, used the name Hallelujah Joe to record sermons. He was best known, though, as "Kansas Joe," musical and marital partner of blues star Memphis Minnie. Between 1929 and 1934 Joe appeared as a vocalist on over forty songs he recorded with Minnie. Among his many compositions was "When the Levee Breaks," which addressed the 1927 Mississippi River flood. The song, on which Joe sang lead vocals, was revived in 1971 by rock group Led Zeppelin.

Joe and Charlie mixed blues, jazz, and pop music as members of the popular Harlem Hamfats from 1936 to 1939. Joe co-managed the band and sang on most of their hits, including "Oh! Red." The brothers also recorded together in the group Big Joe and His Rhythm from 1941 to 1944, sometimes joined by Robert Lee McCoy (a.k.a. Robert Nighthawk), who was reputed to be a relative. By the late 1940s neither brother was active in music, and both died in 1950 - Joe on January 28 and Charlie on July 26. They are buried in Restvale Cemetery in Alsip, Illinois.

THE NATCHEZ BURNING

301 Main Street, Natchez, Mississippi

One of the deadliest fires in American history took the lives of over 200 people, including bandleader Walter Barnes and nine members of his dance orchestra at the Rhythm Club (less than a mile southeast of this site) on April 23, 1940. News of the tragedy reverberated throughout the country, especially among the African American community, and blues performers have recorded memorial songs such as "The Natchez Burning" and "The Mighty Fire" ever since.

Few events in African-American history have been as memorialized as the Natchez fire of 1940. In addition to a monument, markers, museum exhibits, and annual local ceremonies in remembrance of the dead, the fire has inspired both prose and poetry, as well as songs by blues and gospel singers. Just weeks after the disaster, the Lewis Bronzeville Five, Leonard "Baby Doo" Caston, and Gene Gilmore recorded the first commemorative songs in Chicago. The most well-known song to address the topic, "The Natchez Burning," recorded in 1956 by Howlin' Wolf, led to versions by Natchez bluesmen Elmo Williams and Hezekiah Early, rock performer Captain Beefheart, and others. John Lee Hooker, blind ballad singer Charles Haffer of Clarksdale, and Louisiana guitarist Robert Gilmore also sang about the tragedy on various recordings.

The blaze reportedly began when a discarded match or cigarette ignited the decorative Spanish moss that hung from the ceiling of the Rhythm Club (also called the Rhythm Night Club), a corrugated metal building on St. Catherine Street. Windows had been nailed shut, and when the flames erupted, hundreds of frantic patrons stormed the only door. Bandleader Walter Barnes was hailed as a hero for trying to calm the crowd while he and the band continued to play the song "Marie." When the mass of bodies blocked the exit, victims suffocated or were burned or crushed to death.

Barnes, a Vicksburg native, had moved to Chicago in 1923 and recorded with his Royal Creolians band in 1928-29. He developed a successful career taking his dance music to small southern towns where big-time entertainers rarely performed. In keeping with the musical fashion of the era, by 1939 he had renamed his unit the Sophisticated Swing Orchestra. Barnes recruited musicians from several different states for his final tour. The impact of the holocaust hit home not just in Natchez and Chicago, but all the way from Texas to Ohio when the musicians' bodies were sent home for funerals. Fellow band-leader Clarence "Bud" Scott, Jr., Barnes's guest, also perished in the flames.

The *Chicago Daily Defender*, the nation's leading African-American newspaper, covered the Natchez story extensively. Barnes had also been a columnist for the *Defender*, and the paper reported that more than 15,000 people attended his funeral. The first monument to the victims was dedicated on the Natchez Bluff on September 15, 1940, by the Natchez Civic and Social Clubs of Chicago and Natchez. A state historical marker was later erected at the former site of the Rhythm Club.

THE NEW WORLD

133 Martin Luther King Drive, Clarksdale, Mississippi

This neighborhood, known since the turn of the twentieth century as the New World, was a breeding ground for ragtime, blues, and jazz music in Clarksdale's early days as a prosperous and adventurous new cotton town, when brothels here attracted both white and black clientele. Jews, Italians, Chinese, Syrians, and Greeks owned various local businesses, as did some African Americans who lived here, including the Messenger family, which opened its first business on this block in the early 1900s.

The New World acquired its name from Nelson Jones, an African American who built a saloon with an upstairs rooming house on the south side of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad tracks, across from the site where the passenger depot was later built, according to H. L. Talbert, who arrived in Clarksdale in 1891. In 1948 Talbert recalled: ". . . he had a large sign erected on the front which read, Nelson Jones' New World, and this part of Clarksdale has been known by that name all these years." This sector was also once known as Yellow Bottom(s), when early railroad workers stayed in yellow-painted shanties. African Americans moved into the housing when the railroaders moved on. Brick buildings were constructed after a devastating fire swept the area.

W. C. Handy, who lived in Clarksdale from 1903 to 1905, wrote that money flowed in the New World red light district, where his orchestra performed on "big nights, occasions when social and political figures of importance were expected to dine and dance with their favorite creole belles. . . . This led us to arrange and play tunes that had never been written down and seldom sung outside the environment of the oldest profession. Boogie-house music, it was called." A civic campaign led to curfews beginning in 1914 along with laws to control houses of ill repute, streetwalking, gambling, noise, and liquor. World War I brought economic restrictions as well, although Clarksdale would still be promoted as the Wonder City of the Delta, and the New World continued to be a vibrant, if less free-wheeling, district, especially on Saturdays, when plantation workers poured into town. Blues singers performed on the streets, in juke joints, and at the train station. When the popular spots, including the Dipsie Doodle and Messengers, closed at curfew time, festivities shifted en masse back to the plantations. In 1941 scholar John W. Work compared the Saturday night exodus to "a huge reveling cavalcade moving out to the plantation 'where they can have their fun.'"

Founded by Edward Messenger, who had a liquor license as early as 1907-08, Messengers was one of the earliest African American-owned local businesses. His grandson, George Messenger, celebrated the 100th anniversary of Messengers in the 21st century. Other New World bars, juke joints, and clubs have included Wade's Barbershop and Lounge, the Casanova, the Blue Den, J.J.'s, Club 2000, and Club Champagne, but the primary blues venue here for several decades was the Red Top Lounge at 377 Yazoo Avenue, owned by Chester Tarzi and later by James Smith when it was also known as the Pig Trail Inn or Smitty's. Blues singer James Alford also ran Smitty's at one time. Other notable businesses in the New World have included Dr. Aaron Henry's 4th Street Drugs, the Roxy and New Roxy theaters, and deejay Early Wright's remote WROX radio studio.

THE PEAVINE

Highway 446 and North Tims Avenue, Boyle, Mississippi

The "Peavine" branch of the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad met the Memphis to Vickburg mainline at this site. From the late 1890s through the 1930s, the "Peavine" provided reliable transportation for bluesmen among the plantations of the Mississippi Delta. Charley Patton made the branch famous through his popular "Pea Vine Blues."

Prior to the late 1800s, most of the Mississippi Delta region was covered by swamps, thick forests, and canebrakes. Early plantations were established in areas less prone to flooding, and lumber companies used the Delta's waterways to transport their products to the Mississippi River and on to distant destinations. However, these efforts were complicated by flooding, seasonal shifts in water levels, and the need for expensive dredging.

A solution came in the form of railways, which were first introduced in the 1870s and criss-crossed the Delta by the early 1890s. The railway system allowed cotton production to flourish, with many plantations served by small lines. One of these was the Kimball Lake Branch, known locally as the "Peavine Branch," which bluesman Charley Patton saluted in his 1929 Paramount Records recording, "Pea Vine Blues." The Peavine, originally two narrow-gauge lines run by local entrepreneurs, including a lumber company in Boyle, was taken over in the late 1890s by the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Company (called the Y&MV).

The line ran from Dockery Plantation, where Patton lived, and then ten miles west to Boyle, where it connected with the "Yellow Dog" (the local slang name for the Y&MV line), which led to Cleveland and points beyond. The term "peavine" was commonly used for railways that followed indirect routes, resembling the vines of the pea plant. Wisconsin-based Paramount Records' advertising department used a drawing of an actual pea plant to promote Patton's record.

"Pea Vine Blues" is one of many blues songs about railways—a popular metaphor for escape as well as the primary means by which African Americans left the South during the Great Migration. The song's meaning was clear to Delta residents, but obscure to others. Patton's song inspired other recordings on the "peavine" theme by artists including John Lee Hooker, Big Joe Williams, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Charlie Musselwhite, and Rory Block, among others. The leading Japanese blues record company named itself P-Vine Special in 1975 and reissued all of Patton's recordings on CD in 1992.

THE RED TOPS

721 Clay Street, Vicksburg

Between 1953 and 1974 the Vicksburg-based Red Tops entertained legions of dancers with their distinctive mix of blues, jazz, and pop. Under the strict direction of drummer and manager Walter Osborne, the group developed a devoted fan base across Mississippi and neighboring states. Most of the ten original members had played with an earlier Vicksburg band, the Rebops. Vocalist Rufus McKay's rendition of "Danny Boy" was a crowd favorite.

The Red Tops were the most popular band in Mississippi during an era when nightlife centered on the dance floor and couples and hopeful singles donned their finest clothes for evenings out on the town. The group, part of a long line of dance bands in Vicksburg, started during World War II as the Rebops. On weekends the Rebops played on Morrissey's Showboat, a barge moored on DeSoto Island on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River, where alcohol laws were less strict than in Mississippi. Under the leadership of drummer Walter Osborne, the Rebops reorganized as the Red Tops. Their first performance was at the Sequoia Hills Club in Bovina, just east of Vicksburg, on June 20, 1953. The majority of the Red Tops' performances over the course of their history were for white audiences at venues including country clubs, restaurants, ballrooms, high schools, and colleges across Mississippi as well as in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. In Vicksburg these included the Vicksburg Auditorium, site of an annual New Year's Eve dance; the Hotel Vicksburg; and the "BB Club," housed at this location in the elaborate quarters of the B'nai B'rith Literary Association.

The group also performed regularly for African American audiences at clubs including the Blue Room in Vicksburg, Stevens Rose Room in Jackson, Ruby's Night Spot in Leland, the Harlem Inn in Winstonville, the Plaza Hotel in Greenwood, and various Elks lodges. They were joined on occasion by blues harmonica great Sonny Boy Williamson number 2 or the Knights, a local doo-wop group that included future blues recording artist Terry Evans. Saxophonist/bassist Anderson "Andy" Hardwick, the youngest of the Red Tops, spent many summers touring with various national artists, including Lowell Fulson, B.B. King, Otis Redding, Fats Domino, and James Brown. In the early '60s Hardwick and vocalist Rufus McKay left the Red Tops and formed the Fabulous Corvettes, a band whose repertoire was more blues and R&B-oriented than the Red Tops'.

Most Red Tops performances were on weekends, as all of the members had full-time day jobs. Unlike most bands, the Red Tops operated very strictly as a business, with detailed ledgers, annual audits, and bookings often scheduled a year in advance. Their matching uniforms were tailor-made, members were subject to regular inspections and rules of conduct, and rehearsals were held every Monday evening at the YMCA on Jackson Street. The Red Tops stopped performing regularly in the mid-'70s but reunited on a number of special occasions. Multi-instrumentalist Andy Hardwick continued performing regularly as a jazz pianist, while Rufus McKay moved to Las Vegas and sang with Stanley Morgan's Ink Spots and other vocal groups before returning to Vicksburg in 2000.

THE STAPLE SINGERS

110 North Main Street, Drew, Mississippi

Roebuck "Pops" Staples, who lived on the Dockery plantation near Drew in the 1920s and '30s, was the founder of the Staple Singers, one of America's foremost singing groups. The group included his children Cleotha and Pervis Staples, who were born at Dockery, and Mavis and Yvonne, who were born after the family moved to Chicago in 1936. Among the Staple Singers' gospel, rhythm & blues, and pop hits were the No. 1 pop records "I'll Take You There" and "Let's Do It Again."

The Staple Singers, who brought messages of love, hope, and peace to audiences for half a century, built their distinctive sound on gospel and blues traditions from the Drew area. Family patriarch Roebuck "Pops" Staples (1914-2000) was born near Winona and around 1923 moved with his parents and siblings to Will Dockery's plantation near Drew, an important breeding ground for Delta blues. Staples was inspired to take up guitar by local blues artists Charley Patton, Howlin' Wolf, Dick Bankston, and Jim Holloway, and was soon performing at local juke joints. By fifteen he was singing with gospel groups, and continued to do so after moving to Chicago, where he formed the Staple Singers in 1948. The group initially featured his children Cleotha (born 1934), Pervis (born 1935), and Mavis (born 1939) and first recorded for Pops' own Royal label in 1953.

The group gained national attention with the 1956 hit "Uncloudy Day" on the Vee-Jay label, and in the early '60s were refashioned as a "folk gospel" group. They became active participants in the civil rights movement, recording anthems including "Freedom Highway" and "Why (Am I Treated So Bad)," a favorite of their close friend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1968 the Staples signed with Stax Records, where they had numerous hits with positive message songs including "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself." Pervis left the group to pursue artist management and song publishing and was replaced by sister Yvonne (born 1937). The group's last major hit was the Curtis Mayfield-penned "Let's Do It Again" (1975). Both Mavis and Pops later had successful solo careers.

Artists who lived in the Drew area in the post-World War II era include guitarist Boyd Gilmore (circa 1910-1976), whose early '50s recordings for Modern featured Ike Turner on piano and included covers of Robert Johnson songs. Gilmore also recorded for Sun and later moved to California. Drummer Kansas City Red (Arthur Lee Stevenson, 1926-1991) played with Robert Nighthawk before moving to Chicago, where he led bands and ran nightclubs. Singer James Kinds, born near Drew in 1943, began singing blues at one of Red's clubs and later recorded several albums in Dubuque, Iowa, and Chicago. Local fiddler Sylvester Davis founded the Lard Can Band, which included his children James ("Boo Boo") on drums, John on guitar, Sylvester, Jr. on bass, and Clara on vocals. The siblings also played with local bluesman "T-Bone Walker" Joe Louis in the '50s and later performed together in East St. Louis as the Davis Brothers Blues Band. Vocalist-pianist Homer Harris (1916-2000) is best known because Muddy Waters appeared on his lone 1946 session for Columbia in Chicago, while Charles "Guitar" Friday (1934-2003), a veteran of the Memphis blues scene, recorded a 1966 single for Excello, and school-teacher-keyboardist Jesse Gresham (born 1947) recorded for the Jewel label in 1971 before becoming a pastor in Drew.

TOMMY JOHNSON - CRYSTAL SPRINGS

237 West Railroad Avenue North, Crystal Springs, Mississippi

Tommy Johnson (1896 to November 1, 1956) was one of the most influential blues artists in Mississippi in the 1920s and 1930s. He grew up in the Crystal Springs area, where he often performed with his brothers LeDell and Mager. His original songs, which were widely covered by others, included "Canned Heat Blues," "Big Road Blues," and "Cool Drink of Water Blues." He is buried in the Warm Springs Methodist Church cemetery north of town.

Johnson was a pioneer in Mississippi blues whose songs and distinctive falsetto moan were adopted by many of his contemporaries and followers. He was born in 1896 on a plantation between Crystal Springs and Terry and was one of eleven children. Johnson learned to play guitar from his older brother LeDell (1892 to 1972) and as a young teen ran away to the Delta. He returned two years later an accomplished performer, which, according to LeDell, Johnson attributed to a meeting with a mysterious figure at a crossroads. The story, which involved Johnson handing over his guitar to a large black man who tuned it for him, predates the similar and more famous tale of the (unrelated) bluesman Robert Johnson (1911 to 1938) selling his soul to the devil at the crossroads.

In 1916 Johnson moved back to the Delta with LeDell and their wives, settling on a plantation in Drew. There Johnson renewed his ties with local bluesmen who had influenced him on his earlier visit, notably Charley Patton, Willie Brown, and Dick Bankston. After a year in Drew, Johnson traveled for several years and upon returning to Crystal Springs played music locally with LeDell and their younger brothers Clarence (1904 to 1945) and Mager (1905 to 1986). Johnson's brothers lived relatively settled lives—LeDell became a preacher—but Tommy continued to travel extensively, playing in the Delta with Charley Patton and working regularly at parties and dances in Jackson with Rubin Lacy, Charlie McCoy, Walter Vinson, and Ishmon Bracey. Johnson's recordings for the Victor and Paramount labels from 1928 to 1930 included "Canned Heat Blues," "Big Road Blues," "Maggie Campbell Blues," "Bye Bye Blues," "Big Fat Mama Blues," and "Cool Drink of Water Blues," which contains the memorable line "I asked for water, and she gave me gasoline." In addition to his solo performances, he recorded with the New Orleans-based jazz group the Nehi Boys.

Although Johnson did not record after 1930, reportedly due to issues with his rights, he remained a popular performer in Crystal Springs and Jackson, and his influence is evident in the commercial recordings of Kokomo Arnold, the Mississippi Sheiks, Howlin' Wolf, K. C. Douglas, Floyd Jones, and Robert Nighthawk. Musicologist David Evans, author of two books on the blues tradition associated with Johnson, also documented Johnson's local influence through field recordings of Babe Stovall, Arzo Youngblood, Mott Willis, Roosevelt Holts, Houston Stackhouse, and Boogie Bill Webb. Johnson's final performance was at a party in Crystal Springs.

TRUMPET RECORDS

309 North Farish Street, Jackson, Mississippi

Trumpet Records was the first record company in Mississippi to achieve national stature through its distribution, sales, radio airplay and promotion. Willard and Lillian McMurry launched the label from their retail store, the Record Mart, here at 309 North Farish Street, in 1950, and later converted the back room into a recording studio. The first releases by Mississippi blues legends Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Elmore James, and Willie Love appeared on Trumpet in 1951.

Willard and Lillian McMurry, who were furniture dealers by trade, entered the record business by chance, when they acquired a stock of blues and rhythm & blues 78 rpm discs with the inventory of a hardware store they purchased at this site in 1949. They turned the building into the Record Mart when they discovered they had a ready-made market for blues and gospel records on Farish Street, which was already home to much of Jackson's African American music and commerce. The Record Mart also came to serve as the headquarters for Diamond Record Company, Trumpet Records, Globe Music, and Globe Records.

On April 3, 1950, the McMurrys brought the St. Andrews Gospelairens into a local radio station (WRBC) for Trumpet's first recording session. During the next three years, Trumpet utilized sixteen different studios, in Jackson and other cities, before Lillian McMurry began in-house recording, first at the McMurrys' State Furniture Company at 211 South State Street, and then at Diamond Studio in this building. The primary artist on the Trumpet label was Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller), who had eleven records released between 1951 and 1955, the label's final year of operation. The McMurrys continued to record country artists for their Globe label until 1956.

"Dust My Broom" by Elmo (Elmore) James was the only Trumpet record to reach the national rhythm & blues charts of *Billboard* magazine (in April 1952), but other records by Williamson and Willie Love appeared on regional charts as far away as California and Colorado. Among other artists who recorded for Trumpet were bluesmen Jerry McCain, Big Joe Williams, Tiny Kennedy, Luther Huff, Arthur Crudup, Clayton Love, Wally Mercer, and Sherman Johnson; gospel groups such as the Southern Sons Quartette and the Blue Jay Gospel Singers; and country singers, including Lucky Joe Almond and Jimmy Swan.

Lillian McMurry, the creative force behind the label, was known for her sense of fairness and her meticulous accounting. For decades after the last Trumpet record was released, she continued to administer the company's musical rights, taking legal action when necessary to hold other companies accountable for reissues and recordings of Trumpet material, and paying royalties to the original artists, songwriters, and their heirs. Lillian McMurry was elected to the Blues Foundation's Blues Hall of Fame in 1998. She died on March 18, 1999. Her husband Willard, who provided the backbone of support for their business ventures, died on June 7, 1996.

TURNER'S DRUG STORE

100 East Jackson Street, Belzoni, Mississippi

The names of Turner's Drug Store (located on this corner) and the Easy Pay Store across the street are etched into blues history as sponsors of some of the first radio programs in Mississippi to feature Delta blues. In 1947-48 stations in Yazoo City and Greenville began broadcasting live performances by Sonny Boy Williamson Number two and Elmore James from Belzoni via remote transmission. Williamson, James, and other musicians often performed outside the stores, and inside the Easy Pay as well.

Sonny Boy Williamson, also known as "Rice" Miller, was already an established blues radio icon famed for his "King Biscuit Time" program in Helena, Arkansas, when he began broadcasting over Yazoo City station WAZF on programs sponsored by the Easy Pay Store and Tallyho, an alcohol-laced vitamin and mineral tonic produced at Turner's Drug Store. The Easy Pay was wired for Williamson to set up inside the store for the weekday 3:30 p.m. broadcasts while crowds of onlookers watched through the front window. Elmore James often played guitar with Williamson and also sang numbers of his own, including his signature tune, "Dust My Broom." WAZF laid a direct telephone line to Belzoni and built a local studio to commence an enhanced schedule of remote broadcasts beginning on June 1, 1948, although the station had already been featuring Williamson for several months. WJPR in Greenville also carried the Easy Pay/Tallyho shows at one point, further boosting the profiles of Williamson and James a few years before they launched their legendary recording careers at Trumpet Records in Jackson.

Williamson's Tallyho theme song began: "Tallyho, it sure is good, you can buy it anywhere in the neighborhood." Drug store co-owner O. J. Turner, Jr., and Easy Pay proprietor George Gordon were partners in Tallyho, which was produced under a formula licensed from Louisiana senator Dudley LeBlanc, creator of a popular potion called Hadacol, after Gordon happened to meet LeBlanc at the Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans. Turner's son, O. J. "Bubba" III, mixed batches of Tallyho with a paddle in a No. 2 washtub at the drug store, and as the demand spread, Turner, Jr., began delivering Tallyho to drug stores around the Delta from the trunk of his car. The Easy Pay also advertised easy-credit purchase plans for furniture, appliances, and household goods. When Williamson and James weren't on the radio, they were liable to be found playing on the streets, in front of Turner's, and at various juke joints and cafes, including Jake Thomas' and Jack Anderson's. James once lived on the Turner Brothers' plantation with his family and his adopted "play brother," Robert Earl Holston, who often joined him on guitar. Both James and Williamson lived in the Belzoni area at various times in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, and both married Belzoni women, but neither man ever settled in one place for long. Williamson began broadcasting for Hadacol in West Memphis in late 1948, sometimes joined by guests including a young B. B. King, who went on to host a blues show sponsored by yet another tonic, Pep-Ti-Kon, in Memphis. B. B.'s jingle: "Pep-Ti-Kon sure is good, you can get it anywhere in the neighborhood."

TWO STEPS FROM THE BLUES

128 East Main Street, Ackerman, Mississippi

"Two Steps From the Blues" might refer to Choctaw County's location, a bit off the path from the well-known blues highways and byways of Mississippi, but it is also the title of a classic blues song written by a native of Ackerman, "Texas" Johnny Brown. The son of another Ackerman bluesman, Cranston Exerville "Clarence" Brown, Johnny was born in 1928 and moved to Texas in the 1940s. Other blues artists from the county have included Levester "Big Lucky" Carter and Therley "Speedy" Ashford, who both recorded in Memphis.

Ackerman and surrounding communities have not produced blues singers in the same quantity as the more populated areas of Mississippi, but locally born blues artists have earned international acclaim for their accomplishments. Foremost among Ackerman's African American musicians is Johnny Brown, born February 22, 1928. Brown attended Mount Salem Baptist Church and school and later lived in town with his mother until she died when he was nine. Brown went to live with his father, Cranston Exerville "Clarence" Brown, a blind street singer-guitarist and former railroad employee who claimed to have known such famous bluesmen as Peetie Wheatstraw and Tampa Red. Young Johnny danced and played tambourine with him, while their dog, Carburetor, strummed the guitar on cue. The Browns stayed in New Orleans and Natchez in between trips to towns in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In Natchez a Hollywood producer, impressed by their act, invited them to Virginia in 1940 to appear in the film "Virginia." The Browns and their dog were featured in the opening sequence. They returned to Natchez, and in 1950 Billboard magazine reported that Clarence Brown had recorded for a local company there, Sultan Records. He died in Ethel, Mississippi, a few years later.

Johnny Brown, meanwhile, had moved to Houston, Texas, where he played guitar in Amos Milburn's band. In 1949 the band accompanied Ruth Brown on a session for Atlantic Records in New York where Brown also made his own debut recording under the name Texas Johnny Brown. In Houston he did session work and songwriting for Duke Records in addition to touring with Bobby "Blue" Bland and Junior Parker. His best-known composition, the lushly arranged blues ballad "Two Steps from the Blues," was the title track of a 1961 Bland album. Brown recorded a few singles during the 1950s and '60s and released his first album, "Nothin' But the Truth," in 1997 on a label he named Choctaw Creek in honor of his native county. Heralded for his smooth, sophisticated style, Brown began traveling the U. S. and overseas blues festival circuit in the 1990s.

Another Ackerman area native, singer-guitarist Therley "Speedy" Ashford, was born February 4, 1910, north of town near the Natchez Trace. Ashford later lived in Water Valley, Grenada, and Roxie before settling in Memphis around 1949. His only recordings, made in 1973 as part of the duo "Speedy & Red" with guitarist Willie "Little Red" Holmes, were released in England on the album Downhome Blues in 1984. Ashford died in September 1980. The French Camp/Weir area was home to another group of blues musicians, including Big Lucky Carter, who enjoyed belated recognition for his original blues in the 1990s, and R. Lee Miller.

WADE WALTON

317 Issaquena Street, Clarksdale, Mississippi

One of Clarksdale's most talented and renowned blues musicians, Wade Walton (1923-2000) chose to pursue a career as a barber rather than as a professional entertainer. Walton never lost his love for blues, however, and often performed for customers and tourists at his barbershops, including the one he operated at this site from 1990 to 1999. Walton, a popular and respected local figure and a charter member of the city's NAACP chapter, was inducted into the Clarksdale Hall of Fame in 1989.

Wade Walton's contributions to the blues extended well beyond the music he made playing harmonica and guitar and slapping out rhythms with a straight razor and razor strop. Blues enthusiasts, researchers, and musicians called on him at his barbershops for information and introductions, and Walton often escorted visitors around the area. Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, and Ike Turner (whom Walton claimed as a protege) all had their hair cut at Wade's.

Born October 10, 1923, or possibly earlier by some accounts, on Lee May's plantation in Lombardy, Mississippi, Walton was raised on the Goldfield plantation near the state penitentiary at Parchman. His brother Hollis played guitar, sometimes alongside Tony Hollins, an influential Delta bluesman who also worked as a barber; another brother, Frank, blew jug and danced, and Wade soon joined them on guitar. Walton began his barbering career in the 1940s and worked at the Arnold Brothers and Big 6 shops in Clarksdale before starting his own business, a combination barbershop and lounge, at 304 4th Street in the early 1970s. Walton came to the attention of the international blues community after two California college students in search of folk and blues musicians, Dave Mangurian and Don Hill, visited him in 1958. Walton went with the pair to Parchman, where their request to record prisoners' songs garnered a hostile rebuff and became the topic of a song Walton composed after the encounter. On a return trip in 1961, the students were jailed, but after concluding that they were indeed in town to record blues, not to agitate for civil rights, a State Sovereignty Commission investigator dismissed them as "crackpots." They then traveled with Walton to New Jersey for the recording of his album for Bluesville Records, "Shake 'Em On Down."

In 1960 producer Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records and British author Paul Oliver recorded Walton and guitarist Robert Curtis Smith at the Big 6. Smith also recorded an impressive LP for Bluesville, "Clarksdale Blues," in 1961. Walton saw little financial return from his records, reinforcing his decision to remain a barber. Even more disheartening was an ill-fated expansion in 1989 into the nightclub business, which quickly ended in disaster. Walton lost both his shop and the adjoining club, and recorded a song about the incident, "Leaving 4th Street," in 1990. After reopening on Issaquena Avenue, Walton was often joined by his son Kenneth Lackey, who operated Lackey's Entertainment, a "musical catering service." Another son, Luther Lackey, gained fame as a singer on the southern soul circuit after recording a country & western debut album. The Lackey brothers also sang gospel with their mother, Dotsie "Dorothy" Lackey. Wade Walton died in St. Louis on January 10, 2000, and is buried at McLaurin Gardens Cemetery in Lyon, Mississippi.

W. C. HANDY ENCOUNTERS THE BLUES

Front Street, Tutwiler, Mississippi

Bandleader W. C. Handy was waiting for a train here at the Tutwiler railway station circa 1903 when he heard a man playing slide guitar with a knife and singing “Goin’ where the Southern cross’ the Dog.” Handy later published an adaptation of this song as “Yellow Dog Blues,” and became known as the “Father of the Blues” after he based many of his popular orchestrations on the sounds he heard in the Delta.

Tutwiler has been celebrated as “the birthplace of the blues” in honor of W. C. Handy’s encounter here with a solitary guitarist who was performing one of the earliest documented blues songs. Handy, who led an orchestra in Clarksdale from 1903 to 1905, traveled throughout the Delta and beyond, playing dances for both white and African American audiences, but he began to incorporate blues into his repertoire only after hearing the Tutwiler guitarist and a string band in Cleveland, Mississippi. Although Handy’s writings never gave a specific date for the Tutwiler event, the U. S. Senate accepted 1903 when it declared 2003 the centennial “Year of the Blues.”

In his 1941 autobiography, *Father of the Blues*, Handy wrote: “A lean, loose-jointed Negro had commenced plunking a guitar beside me while I slept. His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of a guitar in a manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars. The effect was unforgettable. His song, too, struck me instantly. ‘Goin’ where the Southern cross’ the Dog.’ The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I ever heard.” The song referred to the crossing of the Southern and Yazoo & Mississippi Valley railroads in Moorhead, forty-two miles to the south; the Y&MV (sometimes called the Yazoo Delta or Y.D.) was nicknamed the “Dog,” or “Yellow Dog.” After moving to Memphis in 1905, Handy adapted the blues into a series of compositions that helped sparked America’s first blues craze, including “Memphis Blues,” “Yellow Dog Blues,” “Beale Street Blues,” and, most popularly, the classic “St. Louis Blues.” He was already being hailed as the “Daddy of the Blues” by 1919.

Another pivotal figure in blues history, Sonny Boy Williamson Number. 2, lies buried two miles northwest of here beside the old Whitfield M. B. Church site. A world-renowned singer, harmonicist, and songwriter, Williamson played a pioneering role in broadcasting the blues on the Helena, Arkansas, radio show, *King Biscuit Time*. His songs included “Eyesight to the Blind,” “Help Me,” and “Don’t Start Me Talkin’.” Williamson’s influence extended from his bases in the Delta and Chicago to England, where his 1960s tours helped inspire the British blues movement. He died May 25, 1965.

Other former Tutwiler performers include banjo and fiddle player Tom Dumas, whose music harked back to Handy’s era, and pianist-guitarist Lee Kizart. Both were documented by folklorist Bill Ferris here in 1968 and were featured in the 2009 Ferris book *Give My Poor Heart Ease*.

WGRM RADIO STUDIO

222 Howard Street, Greenwood, Mississippi

Before the 1950s, relatively few African American voices were heard on the radio in the South. A major exception was live broadcasts of performances by gospel groups. During the 1940s this building housed station WGRM, which featured gospel music on Sundays. One of the most popular groups was the Famous St. John's Gospel Singers of Inverness, Mississippi, which included Riley King on guitar. King later became known as "B.B." while working in Memphis.

Radio broadcasting took off in the United States in the 1920s, but for the next several decades the voices of African Americans were largely excluded. Notable exceptions were the character "Rochester," played by Eddie Anderson on the Jack Benny Show, which ran from 1932 to 1955, and harmonica player DeFord Bailey, one of the first stars of the country music program Grand Ole Opry, which began a radio broadcast in 1927 over Nashville's WSM.

Another exception was live broadcasts of gospel music, including a CBS network show that featured the influential Golden Gate Quartet that debuted in 1940. The group's programs had a major influence on young Riley King, who much later adopted the nickname "B.B." In the mid-1940s, King (b. 1925) was singing lead and playing guitar with an Inverness-based gospel quartet, the Famous St. John's Gospel Singers.

The group broadened their popularity through live Sunday afternoon broadcasts over radio station WGRM, which emanated from this building. King eventually became frustrated with the other quartet members' reluctance to pursue a professional career and decided instead to focus on blues. In 1948 he moved to Memphis, where he found work as a disc jockey on WDIA, the first station in the United States to feature all African-American on-air personalities and broadcast content.

WGRM first went on the air in Grenada in 1938 and moved here in 1939. At the time it was one of only nine radio stations in the state. Most programming on WGRM was provided by the Blue Network, owned initially by NBC and after 1943 by ABC, with several locally produced music programs, including the one featuring King's gospel group running on the weekends.

By the mid-1950s WGRM had moved to North Greenwood, and this building was occupied by WABG radio. In rural areas radio stations often doubled as recording studios, and the Greenwood-based band of pianist Bobby Hines recorded in such a setting, according to his guitarist Brewer Phillips. Recorded at WGRM were Matt Cockrell and L. C. "Lonnie the Cat" Cation, accompanied by the Hines band with talent scout Ike Turner also on piano. Both saw release in April 1954 on Los Angeles-based RPM, B.B. King's label at the time. Cation's single "I Ain't Drunk (I'm Just Drinking)" later became a blues standard via covers by Jimmy Liggins and Albert Collins.

WILLIE DIXON

Mulberry and South Street, Vicksburg, Mississippi

Willie Dixon, often called “the poet laureate of the blues,” was born in Vicksburg on July 1, 1915. As a songwriter, producer, arranger, and bass player, Dixon shaped the sound of Chicago blues in the 1950s and ‘60s with songs such as "Seventh Son," "Little Red Rooster," "Hoochie Coochie Man," "My Babe," and "Wang Dang Doodle." Dixon traced many of his works back to poems and songs he heard or wrote as a youth in Vicksburg.

Dixon, born at 1631 Crawford Street, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile east of this site, defined the blues as “the facts of life.” Dixon developed his ear for language and music in Vicksburg by listening to his mother Daisy’s poetry, singing spirituals at Spring Hill Baptist Church, and savoring the blues of pianist Little Brother Montgomery. He learned harmony singing from Theo Phelps, leader of the Union Jubilee Singers, and sang with the quintet on a weekly WQBC radio program broadcast from the Vicksburg Hotel in the 1930s. Dixon also brokered his songs to other WQBC performers. As a teenager, he often left town in search of work during the Depression, loading freight, chopping wood, or shoveling coal, among other jobs, and was once arrested for hoboeing in Clarksdale, Mississippi. In 1936, he moved to Chicago and pursued a brief boxing career. But he continued to sing and write songs, and learned to play a homemade one-string bass.

Dixon recorded with the Big Three Trio and other combos before securing a production job with Chess Records in the early 1950s. He emerged as the studio mastermind behind the classic Chicago blues of Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter, Koko Taylor, and many others. Dixon played string bass on numerous sessions, including the first hits by Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. He also produced the debut releases of Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, and Magic Sam on the Cobra and Artistic labels.

Dixon’s impact reached far beyond the African American blues market. He played a key role in promoting and booking blues in Europe in the 1960s, and covers of his songs by the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and others sold millions of copies. He subsequently toured and recorded several albums with his band, the Chicago Blues All Stars. His achievements earned him induction into both the Rock and Roll and Blues Halls of Fame.

In 1981, Dixon established the Blues Heaven Foundation to assist blues musicians and sponsor blues education programs. After his death in Burbank, California, on January 29, 1992, his widow, Marie, and the Dixon family carried on his mission, and in 1997 they fulfilled a Dixon dream by purchasing the former Chess Records building in Chicago to house Blues Heaven. Dixon is buried in Alsip, Illinois.

Vicksburg honored its native son by renaming this street Willie Dixon Way in 2002.

WOODVILLE BLUES

Royal Oak and Bank Streets, Woodville, Mississippi

Musicians from Woodville demonstrate the breadth of the blues's influence on American music. Composer William Grant Still incorporated the blues into his "Afro-American Symphony," while the innovative saxophonist Lester "Pres" Young helped define the blues-infused jazz styles of the Count Basie orchestra and vocalist Billie Holiday. More traditional blues artists from the area include Scott Dunbar and his protégé Robert Cage.

William Grant Still (May 11, 1895 to December 3, 1978) is best known as the dean of African American classical composers, but he also played an important role in the commercialization and popularization of the blues. Born in Woodville and raised in Little Rock, Still began working in 1915 as an arranger and musician with W. C. Handy's band in Memphis, and later wrote arrangements of "St. Louis Blues" and other Handy compositions for a publishing company run by Handy and Harry Pace. In the early '20s Still served as music director of the African American-owned Black Swan label, where Ethel Waters and others recorded his original compositions. He performed in the orchestra for the historic African American musical Shuffle Along and wrote arrangements for various jazz bands before turning his attention more to classical composition.

Lester Young (August 27, 1909 to March 14, 1959) was born in Woodville and moved to New Orleans as an infant. As a teen he played drums and saxophone in his father Billy Young's band, the New Orleans Strutters. Young later worked with leading jazz bands, including the Blue Devils and the orchestras of Fletcher Henderson, Andy Kirk, Bennie Moten, and William "Count" Basie. Young's smooth and influential approach to the tenor saxophone helped define and popularize the swing style of Basie's band, which featured blues vocalist Jimmy Rushing. Young also performed and recorded extensively with vocalist Billie Holiday.

Scott Dunbar (July 1, 1909 to October 1, 1994), a blues guitarist, worked as a fishing guide on Lake Mary (or Old River Lake) northwest of Woodville. As a young man he played at local juke joints but later performed mostly for white audiences at lodges along the lake. He gained broader attention when Frederic Ramsey, Jr., recorded him in 1954 for an album on Folkways Records; fellow researchers William Ferris and Parker Dinkins later documented his music as well. Robert Cage (born April 4, 1937) studied the music of Dunbar at the juke joint operated by his parents in the Percy Creek community near Lake Mary. Cage later performed at local roadhouses and traveled outside the region after recording a CD in 1998 for the Fat Possum label; he sometimes performed with his son, bassist and vocalist Vincent "Buck" Cage. Other blues artists born in Woodville include Monroe "Polka Dot Slim" Vincent (December 9, 1926 to June 22, 1981), a vocalist/harmonica player who was based in New Orleans, and Jimmy Anderson (born November 21, 1934), a singer, harmonica player and guitarist who also worked as a disc jockey in Natchez. Both Vincent and Anderson recorded several singles in Louisiana.

WROX

257 Delta Avenue, Clarksdale, Mississippi

WROX, Clarksdale's first radio station, went on the air on June 5, 1944, from studios at 321 Delta Avenue. From 1945 until 1955 the station was headquartered here at 257 Delta. Legendary disc jockey Early "Soul Man" Wright became the top personality in local broadcasting after joining the WROX staff. Among the notable blues artists who hosted programs or performed on the air at this site were Ike Turner, Robert Nighthawk, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2, Raymond Hill, and Doctor Ross.

WROX featured "the finest broadcast studios in the state of Mississippi" when the station moved into this building in July of 1945, the *Clarksdale Daily Press* reported. Birney Imes, Sr., of Columbus purchased WROX in the fall of 1944 from founder Robin Weaver, and the station operated under the ownership of the Imes family until 1990, first at this location and later in the Alcazar Hotel building. WROX aired a variety of network and local programs, including drama, comedy, news, sports, commentary, big band, pop, classical, country, and religious, but it would be blues that brought the station widespread fame. Among the bluesmen who performed live from the studios here were Ike Turner, both on his own and as a member of Robert Nighthawk's band, one-man band Dr. Isaiah Ross, singer-saxophonist Jackie Brenston, and Sonny Boy Williamson & the King Biscuit Entertainers. Williamson's "King Biscuit Time" program originated at KFFA in Helena but was also added to WROX's regular weekday schedule in the 1940s when the two stations united in a "Delta Network," providing the band with the option of broadcasting from either location.

Early Wright was one of several key employees, including Helen Sugg, C.D. Graves, and Tom Reardon, who stayed at WROX for decades. Wright, an auto mechanic by trade, came to the station in 1945 as the manager of the Four Star Quartet, a gospel group that had a 15-minute Sunday morning program. Preston "Buck" Hinman, who came aboard as station manager in 1946, was so taken with Wright's down-to-earth charisma and wayward way with words that he soon broke the color line of segregated southern radio and offered Wright a regular show as WROX's first African American announcer. Wright, a born salesman known for his homespun, off-the-cuff advertising patter, sold a full slate of Sunday morning time slots to various local gospel groups and secured a multitude of eager sponsors for his own show among stores that catered to the African American trade "across the tracks." He developed a dual on-air persona as "The Soul Man" when he played blues and R&B records and "Brother Early Wright" when he switched back to gospel. Wright continued to broadcast to a devoted following on WROX until 1998. He died in 1999 at the age of 84.

Wright's historic broadcasts paved the way for other African American deejays at WROX, including Roy Messenger, Clarence Monix, Ike Turner, who held court on a "Jive Till Five" show, and saxophonist Raymond Hill, called "chief of the hepcats" by the *Press Register*. The studios were also used for after-hours recording sessions by various producers and station personnel, including Turner and the white deejay who taught him the ropes in the control room, John Friskillo. In 2004 Clarksdale businessman Kinchen "Bubba" O'Keefe opened a WROX Museum here.

OUT-OF-STATE MARKERS

Follow the path of B.B. King from Indianola to Memphis' Beale Street, and visit the site of the train station where thousands of Mississippi migrants including Muddy Waters first laid eyes on the Windy City. Visit the legendary recording center of Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and discover the rich blues legacy of Helena, Arkansas, home of the pioneering radio show *King Biscuit Time*.

MISSISSIPPI BLUES AND THE GRAMMY AWARDS

Nokia Plaza, 777 Chick Hearn Court, Los Angeles, California

Mississippi blues, country, gospel, soul, and rock 'n' roll artists have played a major role in the development of American popular music, and many have been recognized by The Recording Academy with GRAMMY Awards, Hall Of Fame inductions, and Lifetime Achievement Awards. Mississippi-born honorees include Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Sam Cooke, Bo Diddley, Elvis Presley, John Lee Hooker, and Robert Johnson.

Mississippi Blues lies at the root of many strains of popular music celebrated every year in the GRAMMY Awards. The blues emerged in Mississippi and other states around the turn of the twentieth century, around the same time that the phonograph was gaining popularity. With the success of blues recordings by African American singers in the 1920s, the music became an economically important, though initially low-status, sector of the recording industry. In later decades mainstream acknowledgement of the blues increased dramatically, a development that was both reflected in and aided by various forms of recognition by The Recording Academy.

The GRAMMY Awards were established in 1958, at a time when blues was being eclipsed in the charts by R&B music. During the first decade of the awards, several Mississippi blues artists were nominated in the "Best R&B Performance" category, and the first to receive this award was B. B. King for his 1970 breakthrough hit, "The Thrill Is Gone." Blues gained more prominence that year with the creation of the award for "Best Ethnic or Traditional Recording," which Muddy Waters received for six of his albums between 1971 and 1979. A "Traditional Blues" category was established in 1981, and between 1982 and 2007 B. B. King was the recipient ten times; King also received awards for Best Pop Instrumental Performance, Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals, and Best Rock Instrumental Performance. Other Mississippi-born artists who received GRAMMY Awards in the "Traditional Blues" category include John Lee Hooker, who received three, Ike Turner, Otis Rush, Willie Dixon, James Cotton, Henry Townsend, Joe Willie "Pinetop" Perkins, and David "Honeyboy" Edwards. Roebuck "Pops" Staples received the 1994 award in the "Contemporary Blues" category, which was instituted in 1987.

The Recording Academy has also retroactively acknowledged the role of Mississippi music via the GRAMMY Hall Of Fame Award, established in 1973, which honors recordings of historical significance. Among the dozens of songs featuring Mississippi natives are pioneer recordings by Charley Patton, the Mississippi Sheiks, and Jimmie Rodgers; early electric blues classics by Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, and John Lee Hooker; and soul anthems by Sam Cooke, Rufus Thomas, and several groups that included one or more Mississippi-born members such as the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Staple Singers. Mississippians who have received The Recording Academy's Lifetime Achievement Awards include B. B. King, Robert Johnson, John Lee Hooker, Sam Cooke, Bo Diddley, Honeyboy Edwards, Muddy Waters, Pinetop Perkins, and opera diva Leontyne Price.

This marker's placement on the L.A. LIVE campus acknowledges the presence of The GRAMMY Museum, which offers blues education events that sometimes feature Mississippi artists, and the staging of the annual GRAMMY Awards Ceremony at the Staples Center.

MISSISSIPPI TO ALABAMA

617 U.S. Highway 72, Tuscumbia, Alabama

Musicians have long crossed the Alabama-Mississippi border to perform and record. Mississippians such as Albert King, Little Milton, and Pops Staples recorded at studios in Muscle Shoals and Sheffield, including those owned by Mississippi natives Rick Hall and Quin Ivy. Alabamians Jerry “Boogie” McCain, Frederick Knight and Roscoe Robinson recorded for labels in Jackson, Mississippi, while Florence native W. C. Handy encountered the blues while working in the Mississippi Delta.

Although musical traditions are often defined in terms of state boundaries, musicians have traditionally ignored such arbitrary distinctions in their pursuit of their art and careers. This has certainly been the case for the 300-mile border shared by Alabama and Mississippi. W. C. Handy, known as “the father of the blues,” and Jimmie Rodgers, “the father of country music,” heard the blues while living and working in both states. Blues and soul performers Willie King, Eddy Clearwater, Peggy Scott-Adams, Big Ike Darby, Lucille Bogan, Sir Charles Jones, Bobo Jenkins, and Big Joe Williams also lived in both Alabama and Mississippi, as did one of the earliest-born blues recording artists, Johnny “Daddy Stovepipe” Watson (born in Mobile around 1867), and Ike Zinnerman, mentor of the legendary Robert Johnson. Johnson’s Delta blues tradition was later carried on in Alabama by noted guitarist Johnny Shines. King, Williams, Shines, and Alabamians Jerry McCain, Poonanny, and Roscoe Robinson were among those who recorded in both states.

Muscle Shoals became an important showcase for regional talent after Rick Hall opened his Fame studio here in 1959. On his Fame label Hall recorded local musicians as well as Mississippians James Govan, George Soule, and George Jackson. Muscle Shoals studios also became popular destinations for national labels, including Stax and Atlantic. Albums or singles by Mississippi-associated artists Albert King, the Staple Singers, Syl Johnson, Otis Rush, Otis Clay, Fenton Robinson, James Carr, and Big Joe Williams were recorded here, as were parts of B. B. King’s *King of the Blues: 1989* album, which included a track produced by Alabama’s Frederick Knight.

Mississippi strengthened its connection with Muscle Shoals in 1985 when Jackson-based Malaco Records purchased the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in Sheffield, which was founded in 1969 by former Fame session musicians. Malaco co-owner Tommy Couch, a native of Tuscumbia, began his music career booking bands for University of Mississippi fraternities including the Pallbearers and the Del-Rays, which featured future Muscle Shoals session musicians Jimmy Johnson and Roger Hawkins. Among the Malaco artists who recorded here were Mississippi natives Little Milton, Denise LaSalle, Mosley & Johnson, Artie “Blues Boy” White, and Dorothy Moore. Malaco also benefited from the relocation from Muscle Shoals to Jackson of songwriter George Jackson and arranger Harrison Calloway of the Muscle Shoals Horns.

MISSISSIPPI TO CHICAGO

Grant Park, Roosevelt and Indiana, Chicago, Illinois

The “Great Migration” from the South to “the Promised Land” of Chicago brought more African Americans here from Mississippi than any other state, especially during and after World War II. With the migrants came the Delta blues that was the foundation of the classic postwar Chicago blues style. Muddy Waters, who became the king of Chicago blues, was among the thousands of Mississippians who arrived on Illinois Central trains at Central Station, which stood across the street from this site from 1893 to 1974.

Robert Johnson never moved to the place he praised in his song “Sweet Home Chicago,” but his sentiments were shared by thousands of fellow Mississippi natives who came here in search of a better life. In “Chicago Bound,” bluesman Jimmy Rogers called the city “the greatest place around,” and in “Chicago Blues,” Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup deemed it “the grandest place on earth.” Many migrants traveled north on the Illinois Central (IC) via its extensive lines that spread across the Deep South, including eight hundred miles of IC-owned Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad track that criss-crossed the Mississippi Delta. Pullman porters on IC trains to Mississippi often delivered copies of the African American newspaper, the Chicago Defender, which organized “migrant clubs” and arranged group discounts for train fare northward. The first wave of the “Great Migration” began with World War I, and between 1910 and 1920 the number of black Chicagoans who were born in Mississippi increased from 4,612 to 19,485.

The rise of the blues recording industry in Chicago attracted many musicians, and during the 1930s, blues artists here who claimed Mississippi roots included Willie Dixon, Memphis Minnie, Lil Green, and Big Bill Broonzy. During World War II the need for factory labor helped fuel a larger wave of migration, and between 1940 and 1950 some 150,000 Mississippians moved here. Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Bo Diddley, Jimmy Reed, Sunnyland Slim, Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson Number 2 (Rice Miller), Otis Rush, and Magic Sam were among the many who arrived in the 1940s and ’50s and found recording opportunities with Chess, Vee-Jay (co-founded by Mississippi native Vivian Carter), Cobra, and other labels. Blues clubs proliferated on the South and West sides, and Chicago’s airwaves also took on a down-home Mississippi flavor on programs hosted by Pervis Spann of WVON and Al Benson of WGES, who earned the honorary title “Mayor of Bronzeville” as the South Side’s most popular personality. Local labels Delmark and Testament began recording blues albums in Chicago for a new generation of listeners in the 1960s, paving the way for other companies such as Alligator and Earwig. Albums by Mississippi-born bluesmen Big Joe Williams, Jimmy Dawkins, Carey Bell, Honeyboy Edwards, Big Walter Horton, Eddy Clearwater, Eddie Shaw, Magic Slim, Fenton Robinson, Eddie C. Campbell, and Hound Dog Taylor brought their music to worldwide attention. Foreign tourists made Chicago a musical destination, and the local blues audience adopted “Sweet Home Chicago” as its theme song as the blues expanded to the North Side, the suburbs, and here to Grant Park, where the world-renowned Chicago Blues Festival debuted in 1984.

MISSISSIPPI TO FLORIDA

7152 Moses Lane, Tallahassee, Florida

North Florida's urban clubs and rural roadhouses, including clubs that have operated at this historic Bradfordville location, have played an important role in the history of the Gulf Coast "chitlin circuit" for touring African American blues, jazz, and R&B musicians. Mississippi-born artists B. B. King, Bo Diddley, John Lee Hooker, and many more have performed and recorded in Florida, while some Floridians, including bluesman Benny Latimore, recorded at studios in Mississippi as well.

Florida has long provided work for traveling musicians with its many entertainment centers. Seasonal jobs in agriculture and other fields also drew itinerant bluesmen from Mississippi and other states. One of the most important early carriers of blues was the Rabbit Foot Minstrels touring revue, founded in 1900 by African American guitarist and theater owner Pat Chappelle of Jacksonville and later based in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Early vaudevillian blues performers appeared at theaters in Pensacola, Tampa, and Jacksonville, and in the 1930s Chicago bandleader and national newspaper columnist Walter Barnes, a Mississippi native who used Florida as his wintertime base, helped develop the touring circuit for African American bands in the segregation era. During and after World War II many nightclubs and dance halls emerged on the so-called "chitlin circuit" to provide entertainment for African Americans, including Pensacola's Savoy Ballroom, Gainesville's Cotton Club, Jacksonville's Two Spot, Tampa's Apollo Ballroom, Orlando's South Street Casino, Miami's Harlem Square, and St. Petersburg's Manhattan Casino.

Tallahassee's top African American club was the Red Bird Cafe. Others included the Cafe Deluxe, Green Lantern, Royal Palace, Savoy, and Two Spot. Local musicians included Lawyer Smith, Ray Charles, and Nat and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, who became celebrated jazz performers. In 1964 Allen Henry, Jr., his wife Marion, and his sister Inez Henry Haynes opened the C. C. Club on property the Henrys, an African American farming family, had owned since slavery time. The Henrys had a long history of hosting baseball and musical and social events here. While remaining under the ownership of the Henry family, the club brought in such renowned blues artists as Little Milton, Jimmy Rogers, and Bobby Rush under the management of Dave Claytor and Elizabeth Clark as Dave's C. C. Club and later as the Bradfordville Blues Club under Gary and Kim Anton.

Bob Greenlee's Kingsnake label in Sanford and Henry Stone's various labels in Miami and Hialeah both recorded a number of Mississippi bluesmen. John Lee Hooker recorded for Stone, as did his cousin Earl Hooker, who was once based in the Sarasota area with other Mississippi musicians including Ike Turner, Pinetop Perkins, Johnny O'Neal, and Little Sammy Davis. Little Milton, a frequent visitor to Florida, was also once signed to Stone's Glades label. Floridians who recorded in Mississippi include Pensacola bandleader Wally Mercer, Homestead native Tommy Tate, and Miami resident Benny Latimore. The interchange has also been saluted in songs such as "Mississippi Mud" by Ray Charles and "Deep Down in Florida" by Muddy "Mississippi" Waters.

MISSISSIPPI TO HELENA

106 Cherry Street, Helena, Arkansas

Helena has played a vital role in blues history for artists from both sides of the Mississippi River. Once known as a “wide open” hot spot for music, gambling, and nightlife, Helena was also the birthplace of “King Biscuit Time,” the groundbreaking KFFA radio show that began broadcasting blues to the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta in 1941. The program had logged over 15,000 broadcasts by 2009 and inspired Helena to launch its renowned King Biscuit Blues Festival in 1986.

The town emerged as a major center of culture and commerce in the Delta during the steamboat era and maintained its freewheeling river port atmosphere well into the mid-20th century. Cafes, night spots, and good-time houses flourished, and musicians flocked here to entertain local fieldhands, sawmill workers, and roustabouts who came off the boats ready for action. Many bluesmen ferried across the river from Mississippi or later motored across the Helena Bridge. Others came from elsewhere in Arkansas, up from Louisiana, or down from Memphis.

Helena was at one time home to Mississippi-born blues legends Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller), James Cotton, Honeyboy Edwards, and Pinetop Perkins, as well as to Arkansas natives Roosevelt Sykes, Robert Nighthawk, Robert Lockwood Jr., Frank Frost, Jimmy McCracklin, and George “Harmonica” Smith, all of whom became influential figures in the blues. Williamson, Nighthawk, and Lockwood were among the first bluesmen to play their instruments through amplifiers, paving the transitional path of blues from acoustic to electric music—a development often attributed to Muddy Waters in Chicago in the late 1940s.

Soon after KFFA went on the air on November 19, 1941, Williamson’s broadcasts on “King Biscuit Time” brought blues to an audience that had seldom if ever heard such music on the radio. Up-and-coming bluesmen B.B. King, Albert King, Jimmy Reed, and Muddy Waters all tuned in to the lunchtime broadcasts from the KFFA studios, or on occasion from WROX in Clarksdale, advertising King Biscuit Flour and promoting their upcoming shows at local juke joints and house parties. The sponsor, Interstate Grocer Company, even introduced a Sonny Boy brand of corn meal. During Williamson’s extended stays away from Helena, drummer James “Peck” Curtis kept the program going with an assortment of band members. The show eventually switched to records instead of live music and continued with deejay Sonny Payne at the helm. Off the air only from 1980 until 1986, it still ranks as one of the longest-running programs in radio history. The Delta Cultural Center began hosting the broadcast in the 1990s.

The Arkansas Blues and Heritage Festival, a favorite event among blues enthusiasts around the country, began as the King Biscuit Blues Festival in 1986, welcoming back former King Biscuit Entertainers Robert Lockwood and Pinetop Perkins for the first of many annual appearances, along with a variety of other acts including perennial local favorites Frank Frost, Lonnie Shields, Sam Carr, and CeDell Davis.

MISSISSIPPI TO LOUISIANA

218 Louisiana Avenue, Ferriday, Louisiana

Louisiana and Mississippi have long shared a close musical relationship. One of the most important musical paths was that between Natchez and Ferriday, where African American entrepreneur Will Haney operated Haney's Big House for several decades. In addition to major national acts the club featured local musicians including Ferriday's Leon "Pee Wee" Whittaker and Natchez's Hezekiah Early and Y. Z. Ealey. A young Jerry Lee Lewis often visited the club, soaking up the sounds of the blues.

Louisiana and Mississippi are both world famous for music, so it is hardly surprising that the neighboring states have had plenty of musical interchange over the years. The traveling circuit for New Orleans musicians usually included stops on Mississippi's Gulf Coast, while Mississippi Delta artists often crossed the river to play at clubs in Ferriday, Waterproof, Tallulah, and Monroe. The Shreveport-based Jewel and Ronn labels released records by Mississippi natives or residents Artie "Blues Boy" White, Frank Frost, John Lee Hooker, Sunnyland Slim, and Rev. Willie Morganfield, among others, while the Excello label's Mississippi-born bluesmen Jimmy Anderson and Whispering Smith recorded in Crowley, Louisiana. New Orleans artists Dr. John, Huey "Piano" Smith, Earl King, Bobby Marchan, and James Booker recorded for Johnny Vincent's Jackson-based Ace Records. New Orleans' Mardi Gras Records released CDs by Jimmy Lewis, the Love Doctor, and others, along with a two-volume collection entitled Mississippi Burnin' Blues. Mississippi-born blues artists Eddie "Guitar Slim" Jones, Babe Stovall, Little Freddie King, and record producer Senator Jones all settled and recorded in the Crescent City.

Ferriday's major contribution to this interchange came via Haney's Big House, which featured leading blues and R&B acts including B. B. King, Little Milton, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Roy Brown, Solomon Burke, Percy Mayfield, Big Joe Turner, Ray Charles, Johnnie Taylor, and Irma Thomas. Located on the 500 block of 4th Street (now East Wallace Boulevard), the club was run by African American businessman Will Haney (1895-1972), a first sergeant in the Army during World War I who later worked as an insurance agent. Property records suggest Haney bought the lot that housed the club in March of 1945. In its heyday the club featured about fifty tables and served food around the clock. Haney's other business interests included a hotel located behind the club.

Local musicians who performed at the club included trombonist Leon "Pee Wee" Whittaker (c. 1906-1993), a native of Newellton, Louisiana, who performed for years with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels out of Port Gibson, Mississippi. In the 1950s, when Ferriday was "wide open" for gambling and entertainment, he led the house band at Haney's and hosted a radio show, "Peewee & His Rock & Roll," on KFNV. A frequent visitor to the club in the early '50s was local pianist Jerry Lee Lewis. House bands were also led by Natchez natives Y.Z. Ealey (b. 1937) and Hezekiah Early (b. 1934), who had earlier played the club with Natchez guitarist John Fitzgerald and singer Elmo Williams. Whittaker later played in Early's band, Hezekiah and the Houserockers, for nearly 30 years.

MISSISSIPPI TO MAINE

2 Park Drive, Rockland, Maine

As blues has spread from Mississippi to the far corners of the country and the world, the state of Maine has assumed an active role in the presentation and promotion of the music to appreciative local audiences ever since Mississippi-born blues giants Muddy Waters and B.B. King began coming here in the 1970s. The presence of the blues in Maine was solidified in 1994 with the formation of the North Atlantic Blues Festival, a premier annual event that has featured many Mississippi artists.

Maine was first prominently mentioned in blues lyrics in 1928 when Mississippian Jimmie Rodgers recorded "The Brakeman's Blues," which contained the stanza "Portland, Maine, is just the same as sunny Tennessee; Any place I hang my hat is home, sweet, home to me." Blues probably reached Maine via traveling minstrel and vaudeville shows in the early decades of the twentieth century. African American minstrel troupes first visited after the Civil War, and Maine had its own Kemp Family Minstrel Show, founded in Leeds by George Washington Kemp, a former slave from Virginia. Because of Maine's remote location and small black population, however, few blues performers toured here until the music began to gain a solid foothold in the 1970s among white supporters, on the heels of the 1960s blues revival. The University of Maine hosted Mississippi's James "Son" Thomas in 1972 and staged a blues festival in 1974. Muddy Waters and B. B. King appeared in the state in the 1970s, and other blues artists began performing at clubs including Raoul's, the Loft, and Big Easy in Portland, Red Barn in Monroe, Left Bank in Blue Hill, and Geddy's in Bar Harbor. Appearances in Maine were often made possible by booking artists who were already on tour in Boston, New York, or Montreal. By 1989 the Maine Blues Society had been formed in Portland.

In 1978 Rockland's Paul Benjamin began booking Eddie Shaw and the Wolf Gang at a club where he worked as a bouncer. Benjamin continued to present blues artists, dozens of whom had Mississippi roots, at the Trade Winds Blues Plus Lounge, the Time Out Pub, the Trade Winds Blues Bash festival, and the North Atlantic Blues Festival, including Bo Diddley, James Cotton, Charlie Musselwhite, Honeyboy Edwards, Jimmy Rogers, Otis Rush, Bobby Rush, Mose Allison, R. L. Burnside, Eddy Clearwater, Big Jack Johnson, Super Chikan, Jimmy Johnson, Big Daddy Kinsey, Denise LaSalle, Magic Slim, Eddie C. Campbell, Jimmy Dawkins, Carey Bell, Johnny B. Moore, Matt "Guitar" Murphy, Sam Myers, Lonnie Pitchford, Fenton Robinson, Booba Barnes, Mojo Buford, Melvin Taylor, Smokey Wilson, Zac Harmon, Eden Brent, Lil' Dave Thompson, and Homemade Jamz. Another important figure in putting Maine on the blues map, Randy Labbe of Waterville, was initially inspired by a Muddy Waters performance in Augusta. He began promoting blues in the 1980s and later produced albums for Telarc, Cannonball, and his own Deluge label featuring Mississippi natives Pinetop Perkins, Zora Young, Charlie Musselwhite, Little Milton, Hubert Sumlin, James Cotton, Snooky Pryor, and others. Labbe also produced tribute albums to Mississippi blues pioneers Willie Dixon, Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Fred McDowell, and Howlin' Wolf.

MISSISSIPPI TO MEMPHIS

Rock 'n' Soul Museum at the FedEx Forum; 191 Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee

The bright lights of Beale Street and the promise of musical stardom have lured blues musicians from nearby Mississippi since the early 1900s. Early Memphis blues luminaries who migrated from Mississippi include Gus Cannon, Furry Lewis, Jim Jackson, and Memphis Minnie. In the post-World War II era many native Mississippians became blues, soul, and rock 'n' roll recording stars in Memphis, including Rufus Thomas, Junior Parker, B. B. King, and Elvis Presley.

Memphis blues was discovered by the rest of the world largely via the works of Beale Street-based bandleader W. C. Handy, who began using blues motifs in his compositions shortly after encountering the music in the Mississippi Delta around 1903. By the 1920s many musicians from Mississippi had relocated here to perform in local theaters, cafes, and parks. The mix of rural and urban musical traditions and songs from traveling minstrel and medicine shows led to the creation of new blues styles, and record companies set up temporary studios at the Peabody Hotel and other locations to capture the sounds of Mississippians who came to town to record, such as Tommy Johnson and Mississippi John Hurt, as well as some who had settled in Memphis, including Robert Wilkins, Jim Jackson, Gus Cannon, Memphis Minnie, and Joe McCoy.

In the decade following World War 2 musicians from around the Mid South descended upon Memphis, and their interactions resulted in the revolutionary new sounds of R&B and rock 'n' roll. Riley King arrived from Indianola and soon became known as the "Beale Street Blues Boy," later shortened to "B. B." Many of King's first performances were at talent shows at the Palace Theater, 324 Beale, co-hosted by Rufus Thomas, a native of Cayce, Mississippi, who, like King, later worked as a deejay at WDIA. King and Thomas were among the many Mississippi-born artists who recorded at Sam Phillips's Memphis Recording Service, where Tupelo's Elvis Presley made his historic first recordings for Phillips's Sun label in 1954. The soul music era arrived with the Stax and Hi labels in the 1960s, and again many Mississippians were at the forefront: Stax's roster included Little Milton, Albert King, Rufus Thomas, and Roebuck "Pops" Staples, while Hi producer and bandleader Willie Mitchell, a native of Ashland, oversaw recordings by soul and blues artists Otis Clay, Syl Johnson, Big Lucky Carter, Big Amos (Patton), and others with Mississippi roots.

The revitalization of Beale Street as an entertainment district, beginning in the 1980s, resulted in new performance venues for Mississippi natives including Daddy Mack Orr, Billy Gibson, and Dr. Feelgood Potts. The Mississippi-to-Memphis blues tradition has also been promoted by the Center for Southern Folklore, radio stations WEVL and WDIA, and labels including Inside Sounds, Icehouse, Memphis Archives, Ecko, and High Water. Mississippi has been well represented in the Memphis-based Blues Foundation's International Blues Competition and Blues Music Awards (formerly W. C. Handy Awards), and thirteen of the first twenty artists inducted into the foundation's Blues Hall of Fame in 1980 were born or raised in Mississippi.

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