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MISSISSIPPI JUKE JOINT TRADITION HONORED ON THE BLUES TRAIL

Jackson, Mississippi (June 20, 2009) – The rural juke joint played an integral role in the development of the blues, offering a distinctly secular space for people to socialize, Mississippi Blues Trail marker number seventy-nine will be unveiled at Po' Monkey's juke joint in Merigold, Mississippi on Monday, June 22 at 2:30 p.m.

"Po' Monkey's is part of the fabric of Mississippi's blues history," Governor Haley Barbour said. "Juke joints like this one in Merigold provided the outlet for musicians to get their music heard. Po' Monkey's also has been instrumental in raising the profile of Mississippi blues as a tourist attraction to an international level."

The marker acknowledges both the club as well as the broader juke joint tradition. 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. Owner Willie "Po' Monkey" Seaberry, who was born several miles away from the club in 1941, says that he first opened Po' Monkey's in his house in 1963. Po' Monkey's is in many ways typical of the rural juke joint, which was often named informally after the proprietor. Like Po' Monkey's many juke joints were dimly lit and were furnished with a jukebox, a pool table, beer posters stapled to the walls, and Christmas lights strung across the walls and ceiling.

Unlike other juke joints, though, Po' Monkey's eventually gained international recognition. Its colorful decoration both inside the club and on its outside walls made it a popular destination for news outlets and it appears in books by noted photographers including Annie Liebowitz and Mississippi's Birney Imes, who featured it in his book *Juke Joint*. Initially frequented mostly by locals, Po' Monkey's became a destination point for blues tourists from around the world during the 1990s. For most of its tenure the music at Po' Monkey's has been provided mostly by its jukebox and deejays, but more recently it has hosted performances by traditional Mississippi blues artists including Cadillac John Nolden from nearby Renova, Bill Abel of Duncan, and Monroe Jones of Cleveland.

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour created the Mississippi Blues Trail to recognize the talents of the state's countless musicians in the Birthplace of America's Music. When completed more than 150 sites will offer an unforgettable journey into Blues history.

While markers are scattered statewide, the Mississippi Blues Trail is now outside the state with sites in Chicago and Memphis. The trail starts at the first official marker in Holly Ridge, the resting place of the blues guitarist Charley Patton. The trail then winds its way to sites honoring B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Son House and more.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University, and the Mississippi Development Authority.

For more information on the musicians and promoters honored by the Mississippi Blues Trail, or to submit information on blues artists, contact: Jim O'Neal, Mississippi Blues Trail Research Director (816-931-0383, bluesoterica@aol.com).

For more information, visit the Mississippi Blues Trail on the web at www.msbluestrail.org or the official MDA Tourism site www.visitmississippi.org. To contact the MDA Tourism Blues Trail call Alex Thomas (601-359-3297, athomas@mississippi.org) or Leigh Portwood (601-359-3061, lportwood@mississippi.org).

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