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## **MISSISSIPPI CELEBRATES SAM COOKE WITH BLUES TRAIL MARKER**

Jackson, Mississippi (July 30, 2009) – Sam Cooke, one of America’s most popular and charismatic singing idols, will be honored with the 81<sup>st</sup> marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail during the annual Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival in Clarksdale. The presentation will be at 2 p.m. Friday, August 7, next to the New Roxy Theatre on Issaquena Avenue.

“Sam Cooke’s hit music is legendary, and his name is synonymous with the rich heritage of the Delta where he grew up,” Governor Haley Barbour said. “Mississippi is proud to commemorate his life and career on our Mississippi Blues Trail.”

Blues Trail markers are placed at key sites across Mississippi to honor historic blues locations and to give visitors insight into this unique heritage. As Governor Barbour, the Mississippi Blues Commission, and the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Heritage Trails Program continue to unveil markers, the opportunity to gain a firsthand appreciation for the people and places that inspired the invention of the music is enhanced.

Cooke was born in Clarksdale on January 22, 1931, the son of Rev. Charles and Annie Cook. Sam built a huge following as a gospel singer with the Soul Stirrers after the family moved to Chicago, and in 1957 “crossed over” to the secular music market, adding an “e” to his surname. His 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’s hits included “You Send Me,” “Shake,” “A Change is Gonna Come,” “Chain Gang,” “Twistin’ the Night Away,” “Another Saturday Night,” “Little Red Rooster,” “Cupid,” “Wonderful World,” “Bring It On Home to Me,” and many more. Cooke was one of the first African American recording artists to own his own record label and publishing company, and also made headlines in the civil rights movement by refusing to perform at a segregated concert in Memphis in 1961. He was shot to death on December 11, 1964, in Los Angeles.

Bettye Lavette, who sang “A Change is Gonna Come” at President Barack Obama’s inauguration concert, will appear at the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival as part of Clarksdale’s Sam Cooke celebration, which includes the Mississippi Blues Trail marker dedication on Friday and a Saturday panel discussion.

Sam's younger brother, soul singer and recording artist L. C. Cooke, also plans to attend. L. C. was born in Clarksdale on December 15, 1932, and performed with Sam and their older siblings in a family group called the Singing Children. Although Clarksdale is best known for its Delta blues heritage, and Sam Cooke once named former Clarksdale area bluesmen Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker as his favorite singers, the area has also produced many noted performers in the soul genre. In addition to the Cooke brothers, the list includes Charles Wright (leader of the Watts 103<sup>rd</sup> Street Rhythm Band, famed for their hit "Express Yourself"), Sir Mack Rice (composer of "Respect Yourself" and "Mustang Sally"), Chicago veteran Otis Clay, southern soul stars O. B. Buchana and David Brinston, and local favorite Josh Stewart.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Coahoma County Tourism Commission, Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Division.

The Mississippi Blues Trail when completed will offer over a hundred sites; this path offers an unforgettable journey into Blues history, from the street corners and juke joints where musicians played, to the places they called home, to their final resting spots. Travelers are invited to walk where they walked, dance where they danced and play in the land where it all began. For travel information about Mississippi explore [www.visitmississippi.org](http://www.visitmississippi.org). To contact the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Division's Blues Trail Program, contact Alex Thomas (601-359-3297, [athomas@mississippi.org](mailto:athomas@mississippi.org)) or Leigh Portwood (601-359-3061, [lportwood@mississippi.org](mailto:lportwood@mississippi.org)). For further information on the Mississippi Blues Trail, go to [www.msbluestrail.org](http://www.msbluestrail.org).

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