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## **MISSISSIPPI BLUES TRAIL UNVEILS MARKER FOR FOLK ARTIST AND MUSICIAN SON THOMAS**

Jackson, Mississippi (June 1, 2009) –Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, The Mississippi Development Authority’s Tourism Division Heritage Trails Program, the Mississippi Blues Commission and the Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, will honor James “Son” Thomas with a Mississippi Blues Trail marker to be unveiled on Friday, June 5, 2009 at 2 p.m. at 309 North Broad Street in Leland, Mississippi.

“Son Thomas was a true Mississippi artist,” Governor Barbour said. “Not only could he masterfully play the blues, he could craft unique sculptures from the Mississippi Delta clay. His many contributions to the art and culture of our state will always be remembered and appreciated.”

Thomas played at festivals and gatherings throughout the state including the Mississippi Delta Blues and Heritage Festival. Thomas was recorded by several record labels and is probably best known for his album *Gateway to the Delta* which was recorded by Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. He appeared in the films *Delta Blues Singer: James "Sonny Ford" Thomas* in 1970 and *Give My Poor Heart Ease: Mississippi Delta Bluesmen* in 1975, plus the short *Mississippi Delta Blues* in 1974.

Born in Eden, Mississippi, Thomas was also known as a folk artist for his sculptures made from un-fired clay which he dug out of the banks of the Yazoo River. His most famous sculpted images were skulls (often featuring actual human teeth) which mirrored his job as a gravedigger and his often stated philosophy that "we all end up in the clay." Thomas' skulls can be found on display in several blues museums throughout Mississippi.

He died in 1993 in Greenville, Mississippi. Thomas is buried in Leland and memorialized by a headstone placed in 1996 by the Mt. Zion Memorial Fund and paid for by the fellow musician John Fogerty. His epitaph consists of lyrics from one of his songs. His son Pat Thomas, continues to play and perform his father's songs.

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The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau and Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority. To submit information on the musicians, sites, and promoters honored by the Mississippi Blues Trail, contact: Jim O'Neal, Mississippi Blues Trail Research Director (816-931-0383, [bluesoterica@aol.com](mailto:bluesoterica@aol.com)).

For more information, about the event visit the Mississippi Blues Trail on the web at [msbluestrail.org](http://msbluestrail.org) or the official MDA Tourism site [visitmississippi.org](http://visitmississippi.org). To contact the Mississippi Blues Trail office in Jackson, 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)).

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