

The Cabin/Home of Muddy Waters & Souvenirs - Blues Stories
by Michael "Hawkeye" Herman

In 1999 I visited, with two friends, Muddy Waters' cabin/home site at Stovall, MS, as fate would have it, in the late afternoon just one day before it was to be removed by the House of The Blues (H.O.B.) and placed 'on tour/display' for a few years at their H.O.B. locations around the US before being placed on permanent display at the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, MS, where it stands today.

When we arrived at the location Muddy's home/cabin was still standing, in tact, and a crew of H.O.B. workers were systematically numbering every wooden board and brick of the structure with chalk so that it could be torn down and then accurately reconstructed multiple times in the future, as necessary. My two friends and I hung out and casually poked around the perimeter of the cabin area, staying out of the way and watching the H.O.B. crew meticulously number all of the boards and bricks with chalk.

When they finished the numbering process it was late in the afternoon, and as they prepared to leave the 'crew leader' came over to my two friends and I and told us they were getting ready to leave, that they would return the following day to completely remove the structure, and he quite seriously warned us not to remove any of the chalk-numbered boards and/or bricks from the structure after they left. The H.O.B disassembly crew then all got into their vehicles and left my friends and I at the site.

After they left we continued to poke around the structure's perimeter, and we were also 'free' to poke around in the interior of the cabin/structure, and including the dirt floor. We scavenged around for 'souvenirs' in the 'yard' area immediately surrounding the structure and including the dirt floor interior of the cabin looking for any loose items THAT WERE NOT NUMBERED WITH CHALK, NOR ATTACHED TO THE BUILDING ITSELF as strongly requested/directed by the H.O.B crew leader before the crew departed. We made sure NOT TAKE ANYTHING THAT WAS A CHALK-NUMBERED ASPECT OF THE PERMANENT STRUCTURE.

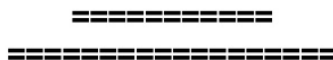
We did find items in the yard near the cabin, in the fireplace/hearth, and lying in/on the dirt floor. One of my friends found a dirt encrusted old metal lipstick case/cover in the dirt near the exterior foundation front door of the structure, and my other friend made the amazing find of the rusted and broken partial hand-grip for a small derringer-type pistol (!). I found the following on/in the interior dirt floor and fireplace/hearth: small loose pieces of wood and antique nails, pieces of charcoal from the fireplace, and a loose fragment of brick from the the interior foundation of the structure.

We DID NOT disturb and/or remove/take any of the chalk-numbered parts of the cabin/home/structure. The following day we went back to Muddy's cabin/home site and we watched, from a safe distance, as the H.O.B crew systematically disassembled the structure and loaded it all on a truck for removal, leaving nothing but the square open bare dirt floor as evidence of where the structure once stood.

Today, so many years later, the bare dirt floor where the structure once stood has long been grown over with grass/vegetation. A State of Mississippi Blues Trail Marker stands at that location commemorating where Muddy's home/cabin once stood.

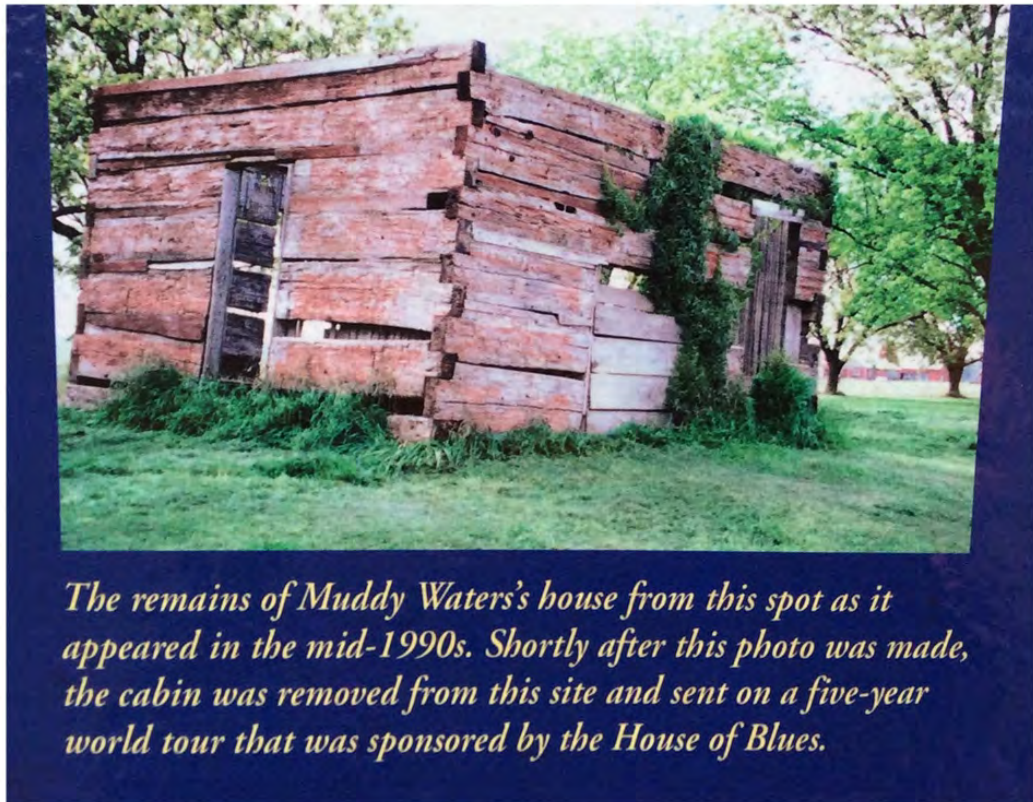
After some years of being displayed at H.O.B. locations all over the U.S.A, Muddy Waters' cabin/home was returned to the Mississippi Delta. It was reassembled and remains on permanent display at the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, MS.

(Please see photos)





Artifacts collected at the site of Muddy Waters' cabin/home in 1999 near Stovall, MS: red brick from the cabin foundation, coal from the fireplace, wood shards, and old nails.

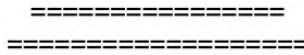


This is how Muddy's home/cabin appeared in the 1990s, shortly before it was removed by the House of the Blues disassembly crew in 1999.



A timeless and evocative view of the sunset across the cotton fields from the doorway of where Muddy Waters' home/cabin once stood on Stovall Plantation. The exact same sunset view as Muddy saw/witnessed, perhaps while playing the guitar & singing at the end of each day when he lived and worked on the Stovall Plantation.

(photo © Michael "Hawkeye" Herman)



Current views of the site of Muddy Waters' cabin/home and Mississippi Blues Trail markers at Stovall, MS. Other than the historic markers, no evidence of Muddy's cabin/home remain.

(photos © Michael "Hawkeye" Herman)





MUDDY WATERS'S HOUSE

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.

Muddy Waters

African American music on the Stovall plantation was documented as early as 1901, when a Harvard archaeologist heard local workers singing what he later described as "autochthonous music," and "strains of apparently genuine African music." Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield, 1913-1983) moved to Stovall with his grandmother from Rolling Fork, Mississippi, c. 1915. The Stovall plantation remained his primary base until he moved to Chicago in 1943.

In August 1941, on a field recording expedition sponsored by the Library of Congress and Fisk University, Alan Lomax and John Work set up portable equipment in Waters's house to record Muddy and other local musicians, including fiddler Henry "Son" Simms. Lomax returned with Lewis Jones in 1942 for a second series of recordings. Two of Waters's recordings, "Burr Clover Farm Blues" and "Burr Clover Blues," paid tribute to plantation owner Colonel William Howard Stovall (1895-1970) and his crop. The Stovalls, one of the Delta's most successful cotton-farming families, were pioneers of agricultural technology, and Colonel Stovall invented the burr clover seed harvester in 1935. Waters told Lomax that he wrote "Burr Clover Blues" at Stovall's request. Waters entertained field hands at his house, which served as a juke joint, and also played at social functions for the Stovalls, as did the Mississippi Sheiks, a popular black string band that Waters admired.

Waters's cousin, The Reverend Willie Morganfield (1927-2003), was born on the Stovall plantation and turned down offers to sing the blues and devoted his talents to the church, becoming a popular gospel recording artist in the 1960s. He was pastor of the Bell Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Clarksdale. Blues singer-pianist Eddie Boyd (1914-1994), who wrote the classic "Five Long Years," a No. 1 rhythm & blues hit in 1952, was also born on Stovall. Stovall resident and blues bassist David "Pecan" Porter (1943-2003) later lived in the house that Muddy Waters had earlier occupied. Porter was active on the Clarksdale blues scene from the 1960s through the 1990s.

Only in the 1980s, after the vacant house was in disrepair, did tourists begin visiting it as a Muddy Waters shrine. In 1987, guitarist Billy Gibbons of the rock group ZZ Top had "Muddywood" guitars crafted from planks of the house. ZZ Top subsequently used the guitars to promote a fund-raising drive to benefit the Delta Blues Museum.

This project was funded in part by a grant from



Photo credit: *Henry Clay*



The remains of Muddy Waters's house from this spot as it appeared in the mid-1960s. Shortly after this photo was made the cabin was removed from this site and set on a five-acre world here that was sponsored by the House of Blues.

*Well, now the reason I love that ol' Stovall's Farm so well
Well, now you know, we have a plenty money
And we never be raisin' hell*

"Burr Clover Blues" - Muddy Waters



This photograph of "Son" Simms and Muddy Waters was made at the time of the field recording session in August of 1941.

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Muddy Waters was the most famous of all Chicago bluesmen, but his roots lie deep in the rich Mississippi soil from which he took his nickname. From the age of three until he journeyed to Chicago in 1943, Muddy Waters (born McKinley Morganfield) occupied a sharecropper's shack at this site on Stovall Plantation. Discovered and recorded here in 1941 by musicologist Alan Lomax, Muddy embarked on a career that would pioneer the development of electric blues and change the course of popular music forever. With legends like The Rolling Stones (whose name came from a Muddy song), The Beatles, Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix acknowledging his influence, his position as a godfather of rock is secure. As his friend and protégé Eric Clapton said, "Muddy Waters' music changed my life, and whether you know it or not, and like it or not, it probably changed yours, too".

Blues Hall of Fame 1981

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 1987

"Burr Clover Blues" - Muddy Waters



*Photo credit:
Middle Tennessee
State University,
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This photograph of "Son" Simms and Muddy Waters was made at the time of the field recording session in August of 1941.