

The Blues Foundation Archives: Immersion and Preservation

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Blues music, while still experienced through live performance, should also be documented and preserved in order to honor and promote one of the world's most essential genres of music. The influence of the blues tradition upon rock and roll artists of the nineteen fifties and sixties as well as upon the contemporary R&B and hip-hop musicians is evident in their similar subject matter, rhythmic underpinnings, and featured instrument - the guitar. Therefore, educating the public and providing scholars and fans with the resources to further appreciate and understand the blues is a significant task.

The Blues Foundation is a non-profit organization devoted specifically to the preservation perpetuation of the blues. In its possession is twenty-five years worth of archival material that is in desperate need of preservation. The goal for this project is to work in conjunction with the staff and Executive Director of The Blues Foundation in order to write a grant proposal for a National Endowment for the Humanities preservation grant award. Organizing its archives, which is divided into photographs, autographed guitars, audio, video, concert, compact discs and cassettes, and miscellaneous, is the first step in a long process of preservation. In order to organize its media, The Blues Foundation will be served by submitting a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to receive funding necessary to undertake such an elaborate project. Due to The Blues Foundation's vast amount of archival wealth, the Foundation and this project, in particular, merit NEH funding consideration. Likewise, these archives will grow with this support, turning Memphis into a national and international blues hub for research.

Blues music, the first American genre of music to become an international success,

hearkens back to its first reference in Charlotte Forten's 1862 diary and the twentieth century popularization of this distinctly African-American style of music.¹ Originating in western African cultures and disseminating throughout the South by means of the slave trade, tribal music became the means by which slaves maintained their heritage and coped with their new and misfortunate lot. The instrument that accompanied these songs and became the connection between tribal music and the creation of the blues was the African banjo, which slaves brought with them to the South.² Strumming a rhythm behind the vocalist and embellishing upon the notes between lines, the banjo became the model for the blues musicians' early guitar styles.

As this musical tradition flourished in the Delta, blues musicians gained popularity on the plantation as well as commercially. By the early twentieth century, W. C. Handy had published blues songs and became well-known for his "St. Louis Blues", later recording a version of this song. With Handy's fame and the growing popularity of the blues style, Memphis became a significant player in the establishment of this new genre, largely due to Handy's song "Memphis Blues" or "Mister Crump" - a favorite during the 1913 mayoral race.³ Memphis' location on the Mississippi River also made Beale Street a center for African-Americans to gather, buy and sell goods, and exchange ideas and musical styles. Likewise, Memphis' association with the blues has continued throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Musicians from rural Mississippi would travel to Memphis to play small night clubs on Beale Street because it was the closest big city; even B. B. King moved from Mississippi to Memphis and began his affiliation with WDIA radio, gaining him local popularity with both the white and black audiences before

¹ Allan Moore, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) xii.

² Samuel Charters, "Workin' on the Building: Roots and Influences," Nothing But the Blues: the music and the musicians, eds, Lawrence Cohn, et al. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993) 16.

³ Ibid. 19.

the onset of rock and roll.⁴

This correlation between music and racial integration carried over into the style of another Memphis legend, Elvis Presley. Combining a country rhythm, blues lyrics, and sexual stage antics, Elvis made Memphis the home of rock and roll, usurping its blues tradition. However, had it not been for Memphis' reputation as a big city and its location north of Tupelo, Mississippi on the river, Elvis' family may never have moved to Memphis. He may never have spent time on Beale Street with African-American blues musicians, such as B. B. King, or paid to record two songs at Sun Studios. Therefore, geographically and stylistically, the blues influenced and spawned the world's first international musical sensation - rock and roll; and it happened in Memphis.

Likewise, blues became the predecessor of R&B and hip-hop, which can also be associated with Memphis, through Stax. "An oasis of racial harmony", Stax brought Memphis music to a new level of fame among the growing African-American audience.⁵ Isaac Hayes, Steve Cropper, Albert King (a blues artist), and Rufus Thomas were several Memphis musicians who recorded at Stax and became legends. Soul and blues inspired the works of contemporary artists such as D'Angelo, Salt 'N Peppa, and R. Kelly, who have all covered songs previously recorded by Stax artists.⁶

The History of The Blues Foundation

Although blues music had been a leading force in Memphis for almost a century, it was not until 1980 that The Blues Foundation began. With the efforts of its then-Executive Director, Joe Savarin, and the city of Memphis, the non-profit organization created a center for blues

⁴ Gérard Herzhaft, Encyclopedia of the Blues, trans. Brigitte Debord, 2nd ed. (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1997) 108.

⁵ Stax Museum of American Soul Music 2004, 10 June 2005 <<http://www.soulsvilleusa.com/about-stax/legacy/>>

⁶ Ibid.

media, support, and recognition. Its major goal was the establishment of an annual blues awards program, known as The Handy Awards, named in honor of Memphis' own W. C. Handy, and held each year on the anniversary of Handy's birth. These awards took place at the Peabody Hotel, a place where most of its nominees were not even allowed to enter during the early years of blues music. Making reparation for the years prior to this first awards show, The Blues Foundation bestowed honors on older blues musicians by inducting them into the Blues Hall of Fame. There were twenty artists inducted at the first awards program.⁷

In the years that followed, The Blues Foundation became a well-known international organization, with over one-hundred and thirty-five such groups in five countries having paid annual dues of one hundred dollars in order to become affiliates of Memphis' umbrella group.⁸ One of the projects that The Blues Foundation prides itself on is the Blues in the Schools project which it started at Grahamwood Elementary School and expanded to other Memphis City Schools.⁹ Serving as a means for cultural enrichment, this program informed children of the history of blues music and instructed them on playing instruments. The children also participated in the early Handy Awards shows by performing songs that they had learned throughout the year in the program. Another early achievement was the development and dedication of W. C. Handy Park. Joe Savarin and charter member, Amie Devereux, convinced the city to clean the park and provide it with electricity in order for bands to perform on Beale Street in an effort to attract locals and tourists to the once-populated entertainment district.¹⁰ This initial act may have given the city the incentive to continue with the revitalization of Beale Street and the Downtown district.

⁷ "First Annual W. C. Handy Blues Awards," Living Blues. Winter 1980-81: 6.

⁸ Blues Foundation: Affiliate Home 2003, 15 June 2005 <www.blues.org/affiliates/index.php4>

⁹ The Blues Foundation, (author unknown), The History of The Blues Foundation, 2000: 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1.

Although long-awaited, The Blues Foundation provided the city with such promise in the early years that it would awaken a significant piece of Memphis' heritage and prove to be a dominant force in the music, economic, and entertainment industries of the city. The Handy Awards had survived its first few years; there were talks of collaborations taking place soon between The Blues Foundation and the Smithsonian Institute; and the blues community had begun to embrace the organization. In fact, The Blues Foundation had begun designing and raising the two hundred thousand dollars for a ten thousand square foot blues museum on Beale Street, which would house a hall of fame and a five-hundred seat cabaret as well as The Blues Foundation office.¹¹ The future of The Blues Foundation and the Handy Awards became even more promising in 1986 when the Handy's were rated "one of the top twenty festivals/special events in the Southeast".¹² It appeared that Joe Savarin's dream of gaining recognition for the blues was becoming a reality.

However, political situations are always subject to change. Savarin found this out when in a 1990 vote, the Board ousted him in order to make changes that would improve the growing Foundation, whose Handy Awards the previous year had been televised by TNN and the BBC. "The stakes [are] too high for things not to be run efficiently," said David Simmons, who had just become the new president of the Board of Directors.¹³ This came after Savarin made a motion to declare himself Executive Director for life and later said, "Most of the time, and I have to be frank with you, the Board went along with the things I wanted to do, and I was kind of a little dictator if you will."¹⁴ Complaints had been made prior to the Board's decision concerning the mishandling of Handy ballots and the mismanagement of funds from within The Blues

¹¹ "Foundation plans blues Preservation Hall," Press-Scimitar 29 Feb. 1982.

¹² "Blues Awards Show Rated Top Southeastern Event," Commercial Appeal 24 Oct. 1986.

¹³ Ron Wynn, "Blues Panel offers pact to Savarin," Commercial Appeal 6 June 1990: C1.

¹⁴ The Blues Foundation, 5.

Foundation as well as from the blues community. The responses to the complaints as well as the desire for change were warranted; however, Savarin became indignant and filed a seven hundred thousand dollar lawsuit against the non-profit organization that he had started ten years earlier.¹⁵ The lawsuit was to compensate him for his services because in the beginning, his contract stated that he would be paid a salary once The Blues Foundation earned enough to do so, and with his dismissal, he decided to collect. He locked The Blues Foundation offices, refused to hand over records and assets to the Board, filed individual lawsuits against Board members, and attempted to get The Blues Foundation evicted from its Handy House headquarters.¹⁶ Eventually, Savarin lost the lawsuit and, in return, owed The Blues Foundation ten thousand dollars in legal fees, ending this two-year nightmare of legal battles.

Although the lawsuit ended, the damage that it had done to the Foundation remained for years afterward. The key word was credibility, and The Blues Foundation had lost it in regards to its Board, its supporters, and the blues community. The biggest shock was the bomb threat that was called in to the Peabody Hotel Ballroom during the 1990 Handy Awards, which was the same year that the Savarin controversy had begun. The anonymous caller claimed there were "three bombs in the Ballroom that would go off within an hour of the call".¹⁷ Calmly clearing the room of its twelve hundred guests, The Blues Foundation staff claimed that the stage needed to be reset for a special guest and took a thirty minute intermission. Whether or not this was part of the infighting and political struggles that continued throughout the first few years of the '90s do not matter. The issue at hand was the survival of an organization that possessed the potential to create its own demise. Unfortunately, the legal battles and infighting continued, and The

¹⁵ Ibid. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ London, Brian and Emily Goodman, The W. C. Handy Blues Awards: A Comprehensive 25-year History, Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies, Music 26 Aug. 2003.

Blues Foundation was forced to reorganize or fold. After the Savarin lawsuits, The Blues Foundation was hit once again from within the organization. Jay Sheffield, the owner of Huey's restaurant in Memphis, who was at this time the Executive Director, also filed a lawsuit against the Foundation for compensation after not receiving his ten percent of the money that the Foundation had received during his term.¹⁸ He won the meager four-thousand dollars in court; however, the case was not settled until 1996. Financial complications, on account of the political problems that The Blues Foundation had faced, left it in desperate need of revitalization. Fortunately, the Foundation received a Challenge Grant from the NEH that provided it with one hundred thousand dollars over a period of two years. The grant required The Blues Foundation to become an international organization with an Executive Director, a paid staff, and a date for the Handy Awards that coincided with Memphis in May, in order to revitalize the show, which had been downsized to accommodate the lack of organization and funds.¹⁹

In the years that followed restructuring, the Foundation attempted to regain lost ground and move forward with its plans for a museum, a hall of fame, and a stronger international connection through its annual International Blues Contest. Although local individuals and those from within the Foundation noticed the improvements, the cynicism of larger cities that expected the Foundation to regress once again into its habit of disorganization and instability began what was seen as a courtship period for The Blues Foundation. Talks began about moving it to a larger city that could support it financially and provide it with a stronger infrastructure that would be necessary to gain a wider audience. Although Chicago had previously taken an interest in hosting the Handy Awards during the 1992 financial struggles, the new bids to relocate The

¹⁸ The Blues Foundation, 10.

¹⁹ Ibid. 11.

Blues Foundation were more promising.²⁰

Baton Rouge, Louisiana became the frontrunner with an offer in 2002 to move The Blues Foundation headquarters to an office above a popular blues club that had just opened and provide the Foundation with administrative support in a setting that would benefit The Blues Foundation as well as Baton Rouge's tourism industry.²¹ Citing that the Foundation had lost money for two years and that Memphis' pessimism and fear found in its blues fundraiser title, "Don't Lose the Blues" suggested that a move would be in its best interest.²² Although Memphis did not want to lose the Foundation, its interim Executive Director, Pat Mitchell, stated, "You just can't turn down any offer."²³ With this in mind, members of The Blues Foundation met with the Louisiana group and discussed the possibilities. As promising as the terms sounded, The Blues Foundation declined the offer and decided to remain in Memphis, with the support of a fifty thousand dollar grant from the Hyde Foundation.²⁴

In the years following the award, The Blues Foundation has regrouped and has hosted several years of successful Handy Awards with special guests, including Bonnie Raitt and Robert Randolph. The present Executive Director, Jay Sieleman, has also managed the budget carefully in order to prepare for future Handy Awards and project expenses regarding archival research and preservation. While the future of The Blues Foundation depends upon the climate of Memphis' entertainment industry and its financial situation, working towards a stronger archive and NEH funding would provide the Foundation with optimistic and reasonable goals for the future of its archives. The catalogue includes various media which will be organized according

²⁰ Larry Nager, "Blues Unit Struggling to Survive: Infighting is blamed; reorganization begins," Commercial Appeal 6 Apr. 1993: C1.

²¹ Associated Press, "Louisiana Courts Blues Foundation," 13 Oct 2002: B1.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jody Callahan, "Music leaders warn against lost of Blues Foundation," Commercial Appeal 14 Oct 2002: A2.

²⁴ Nager, C3.

to the categories that follow.

Cataloguing

As pictures, newspaper clippings, recordings, videos, and memorabilia began to accumulate in cardboard boxes in the basement of The Blues Foundation, the requirement of a system for organization became vital. Stacks of pictures roughly labeled "Handys '86" or "Rufus", if at all, were scattered on tables and shelves. With the carpet still stained from the last flood at The Blues Foundation's Front Street and Union location, the hopes of preserving twenty-five years worth of material became a race against time and the Mississippi. The key was to first keep everything off the floor and to develop a system for organizing the photographs. This mammoth task included various types of pictures from various sources. There were snapshots taken at blues festivals, awards shows, and on Beale Street with disposable cameras by The Blues Foundation staff. Also, there were professional shots of Handy Award winners throughout the years, posing with their trophies in front of backdrops. Some musicians had sent press packets with band photos for advertisement purposes. However, the photographs that validate this mission are the ones that photographers, blues fans, and musicians have sent from their personal collections as donations to The Blues Foundation in appreciation of its effort to preserve and to honor the blues. Voluntary support from individuals throughout the world has been one of the major incentives for The Blues Foundation to want to better store and protect these images. Videos and recordings have also come from various sources; however, The Blues Foundation is still in the process of collecting and organizing pictures.

Photographs

The first step in sorting through the pictures is to develop a filing system. Without the proper funds, The Blues Foundation has settled for temporary storages boxes, manila folders, and

envelopes, in hopes that these will transfer into better storage facilities and systems in the event of receiving a preservation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Each folder has been labeled with the name of an artist (last name first) or an appropriate title, such as "Staff". However, because many well-known blues artists use nick-names or only first names, the alphabetizing became problematic. Editorial license took place in an attempt to catalogue these artists in the most logical ways. Scanning the indexes and alphabetizing systems used in books about blues music gave The Blues Foundation several models for organization. Two significant sources were Gérard Herzhaft's *Encyclopedia of the Blues* (cited previously) and Francis Davis' *The History of the Blues: the Roots, the Music, the People from Charley Patton to Robert Cray*, as both cite the majority of iconic blues musicians throughout the past century.

Not only did alphabetizing slow the process of cataloguing, several other glitches occurred. Due to improper storage, several hundred of the pictures were in some way stuck together and thus in a potential state of ruin. Most of the endangered photographs survived, after painstaking hours of individual separation with rubbing alcohol and cotton. The few images that the archives possess of KoKo Taylor came from the stack of salvaged photographs, which raises another problem for archivists. Although The Blues Foundation possesses thousands of photographs, issues of quality and quantity remain. There are several artists and file titles that possess a vast amount of images; other folders contain just one or two. Amateur photography is just that - amateur- causing some of the images to be formally less valuable. The folders with a surplus amount of images must be placed into large envelopes that will hold a larger capacity of photographs. These envelopes contain images of the more popular blues musicians such as B. B. King, or of random shots of crowds on Beale Street and at festivals. Although stored in a different container, these envelopes are also alphabetized in the same fashion as the folders.

When working with new photographs, the system does break down because many of these images that come into The Blues Foundation are digital. There is a desire to remain contemporary, and the grant money for this specific grant could go towards the digitization of older media. It is unclear whether or not to create a digital catalogue for these images. At the moment, the easiest way to house them would be to print them and add them to the folders as tangible pictures, thus reducing the amount of confusion when looking for a specific artist's photographs and folder. Digitization would become the next step, followed by an online index.

Although the staff at The Blues Foundation is quite skilled in its ability to identify thousands of blues musicians from different eras, identification of those in the photographs does take time. There are usually several people in the photographs. The matter of determining who the minor figures are becomes complicated. Creating a booth at The Handy Awards where individuals could assist in identification would aid the Foundation and involve its supporters in its endeavor. The Blues Foundation also honors local musicians and hosts international amateur blues contests; therefore, one's familiarity with the local music scene and the international contests aids in the identification process. Expertise and references also play key roles. Herzhaft's encyclopedia and Austin Sonnier, Jr.'s *A Guide to the Blues: History, Who's Who, and Research Sources* remain close to the files for certainty and correct spellings.

The next and most troubling step for any archivist, or historian for that matter, is determining what is important. There are images that are obviously more significant than others, but rather than playing photo-god, cataloguing all of the photographs has been the best initial procedural method. The process will come down to choosing which photographs are the most valuable pieces in the archives because in order to apply for a preservation grant, the NEH requires a catalogue of the items being proposed for consideration. It becomes a matter of

connoisseurship. Quantity, quality, and popularity become important to The Blues Foundation as well to the NEH.

In the catalogue a variety of types of photographs is desired. For example, an archive filled only with posed Handy Awards winners would not be of as much interest as shots of musicians onstage, at various points in their careers, and also accepting a Handy Award. Likewise, there are images in the archives of "jam sessions" at the Handy's or at other events. Several of the best photographs in the archives are of a very well-known B. B. King and (at this point) a young Stevie Ray Vaughan, unknown to older blues fans as well as to the general public. These images, due to their rarity, will be emphasized in the catalogue given to the NEH. Other rare images include photographs of John Lee Hooker, a young B. B. King, KoKo Taylor, Ray Charles, and W. C. Handy. Although these photographs possess significant value, due to their scarcity, there are other photographs that rival them in composition, the photographer's skill, and the chosen moment of the photograph.

One of the "best shot" photographs is one of Keb 'Mo onstage at the 1998 Handy Awards. This photograph's aesthetic qualities make it a strong addition to the collection. Another reason that it is so valuable is that it was sent to The Blues Foundation by a photographer, Chuck Winans, who frequently donates his images and services to these endeavors. The interaction between the musician who agrees to perform, The Blues Foundation which organizes the event, and the fan/photographer that takes and submits the photograph becomes a dialogue in itself. Some photographers remain nameless, sending envelopes without copyright stickers on the backs of photographs, simply donating their time, film, and energy to the cause. The staff members and past and present Executive Directors of The Blues Foundation do not gain credit for their photography work either, which comprises seventy-five percent of the

archives. Given their dedication to the organization and its status as a non-profit, such recognition may be rendered unnecessary.

There are many home photographs of famous musicians taken by the staff and Executive Directors that are worthy of mention. These include envelopes filled with photographs of Little Milton, Sam Phillips, Ruth Brown, Rufus Thomas, and Ike Turner. Others, some with only one or two in each folder, are of Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Susan Tedeschi, Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan, Carl Perkins, Bobby Rush, Morgan Freeman, Bernard and Luther Allison, and Little Richard. These are highlights in the index of artists; however, other celebrities appear in photographs as well. For example, Cybil Shepherd has a folder filled with photographs of her performance and presentation of awards at the 1994 Handy Awards, which she co-hosted with Isaac Hayes. As a resident, she has become a popular figure in Memphis. Another individual with a similar status and familiarity is Morgan Freeman, who was also photographed at the same Handy Awards program. Freeman has been a strong supporter of music, hiring Memphis and national blues acts to perform at his club, Ground Zero, in Clarksdale, Mississippi. He also makes appearances at the club regularly, talking with the musicians and club-goers. Photographs of both of these national celebrities and hometown favorites earn places of respect in The Blues Foundation's archives.

Although not featuring celebrities or famous musicians, images of events in the history of The Blues Foundation and the evolution of Memphis exist in the archives. There are photographs of the first location of The Blues Foundation, which was W. C. Handy's shotgun house that had been moved from its original location in south Memphis to a lot at the corner of Beale Street and Fourth Street. Photographs of the interior as well as the opening ceremony celebration document the beginning of an era dedicated to preserving the blues. There are also

images of Beale Street before reconstruction began, showing buildings that no longer exist and documenting the street's earlier history. Professional photographs of Handy trophies from different years and the W. C. Handy statue in Handy Park also celebrate The Blues Foundation's success.

Other miscellaneous shots of crowds at Memphis in May or of blues festivals around the world also suggest the continued interest in blues music and The Blues Foundation's desire to broaden this audience through its endeavors. One image that does stand out is one taken of Furry Lewis' headstone. The reason that this photograph possesses such significance is because The Blues Foundation purchased the headstone in honor of the deceased legend. The Blues Foundation's Executive Director at the time, Joe Savarin, acknowledged such injustices and, in turn, summarized the organization's mission statement, when he said, "These (blues) people have gone far too long without being memorialized. We had to take up a collection to buy Furry Lewis a headstone. Come on."²⁵ A grant from the NEH would be productive and give money to an organization that honors blues musicians who never received the money that they earned from their fame and talent.

Autographed Guitars

Once the photographs are organized and catalogued, The Blues Foundation must conduct an inventory of its other media. The room filled with autographed guitars that are sitting in cases in another room in the basement will be of value in the grant proposal. The funds from the grant would obtain proper glass cases for the guitars, allowing The Blues Foundation to display them in its office, until it reaches its long-term goal of having a blues museum and hall of fame. Items in this collection include a Gibson Epiphone guitar signed by Bobby Rush, James Cotton, Marcia

²⁵ Scott Hill, "Memphis music makers struggling for audience, have right to sing blues," Commercial Appeal 18 June 1982: C1.

Ball, Robert Lockwood, Jr., Willie Smith, and Shamikia Copeland. Another is autographed by Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin. When the Rolling Stones were in Memphis, they, too, signed a Gibson; however, it was a Studio model. Two guitars from the 1998 Handy Awards have signatures of Ray Charles, Pinetop Perkins, Bobby Rush, Boz Scaggs, Steven Stills, and Bobby Blue Bland. While these guitars are all quite valuable, there are three that are especially significant and rare. First, there is a B. B. King model Gibson Lucille replica that is black with gold hardware and is signed by B. B. King. There is a Gibson Epiphone signed twice by John Lee Hooker, whose writing ability is quite limited, due to the fact that he was illiterate. The most contemporary of the three is an Eric Clapton model Fender Stratocaster in gun metal gray that he has signed. Clapton's allegiance to Robert Johnson as well as the blues has made him one of the most significant modern musicians to advocate and incorporate the Delta style. While there are other guitars worthy of mention, these have become the first to be displayed in The Blues Foundation office.

Audio

The Blues Foundation also houses audio and video recordings that are rare and usually not in circulation. The audio selection consists of radio interviews, and advertisement for Blues Foundation events. The Blues Foundation once possessed hours of ADAT recordings, which are digital audio recordings, of live performances of significant blues musicians at local clubs. Recordings of thirty-nine different artists from B.B. King's Club in Memphis are among the collection. These artists include Chris Thomas King, Blind Mississippi Morris, Magic Slim, Charlie Musselwhite, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Chris Duarte, Deborah Coleman, and Bernard Allison as well as local artists Kirk Smithart, James Cotton, Preston Shannon, and Reba Russell. There is also an ADAT recording of the North Mississippi All-Stars at the New Daisy Theater.

These recordings of each artist consist of two one-hour sets, or four reels of ADAT tape, totaling over eighty hours of digital recordings live from Beale Street. These were purchased by The Beale Street Blues Caravan radio program upon receiving a grant for preservation. These recordings remain in The Blues Foundation's care and must be properly organized, catalogued, and stored until transferred.

Video

The collection of video recordings is also extensive. There is a rare recording of a memorial for Lady Laura, or Little Laura Dukes, in the collection; Musicians are performing a "Strut Down Beale" in her honor in October of 1992. Similar treasures are recordings of John Lee Hooker, Wesley Jefferson Review, Jesse "Wild Bill" Austin, and Chubby Carrier and the Bayou Swamp Band. Music videos and performances of other famous artists exist as well. For example, there are recordings of Mighty Mo Rodgers performing "Blues is My Wailin Wall", Taj Mahal's "Señor Blues" and "Mr. Pitiful", Lightnin Willie & the Poor Boys' "20 Flight Rocket", Roy Rogers' "Video Profile" and "Bad Situation", the B-52's performing "Rock Lobster", Mem Shannon's "A Cab Driver's Blues", and Dire Straits' "Sultans of Swing". Several of these videos have been sent to The Blues Foundation as video press kits, which are put out by record companies prior to the release of an artist's new material, in order to obtain responses from the insiders in advance of the public reception.

Concerts

Full-length concerts are part of the collection and have been recorded or purchased by The Blues Foundation throughout the years. These include: "Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble live at the El Mocambo", "Muddy Waters: Got My Mojo Workin'", "John Lee Hooker and Friends: Live from the House of Blues", and "Eric Clapton: Nothing but the Blues" on Beta,

as opposed to VHS. The Blues Foundation's events and news pieces have also been documented on VHS. There are also local news clips about the '93, '95, '97, '98, '99, and 2000 Handy Awards along with recordings of the Hall of Fame inductions from 1999 and 2002 and the entire 1998 Lifetime Achievement Awards in Los Angeles. Filmmakers have sent documentaries that they have made about the blues to The Blues Foundation. One of the most interesting and valuable documentaries is one that came from Memphis' own Center for Southern Folklore. It is entitled "All Day & All Night: Memories from Beale Street Musicians". This balance between local, national, and international archival material and interest indicates the significance of The Blues Foundation and its extensive collection.

Compact Discs and Cassettes

There is a large collection of compact discs and cassettes from artists who have sent them to The Blues Foundation in order to receive recognition and to become part of the larger blues community centered around Memphis. Some of these artists are national recording artists who have just released new material. Others are unsigned artists who pressed and released their own music. The only way to obtain independently released music is either through purchasing compact discs at live performances where musicians have them to sell or to order them from the artist's website. Due to the fact that these artists only pressed a limited amount of copies and sell them for only a limited amount of time, the items, in most cases, become irreplaceable. These compact discs are important because they document the contemporary blues style and how it has progressed over time.

Clippings

In twenty-five years, random press coverage accumulates, especially if an organization is the sole benefactor of blues music. The Blues Foundation's newspaper and magazine articles

track the history, good and bad, and provide a record of its progress as well as the progress that Memphis and blues music have made, on account of The Handy Awards and the renovation of Beale Street. Although the clippings are extensive, there are gaps in the Foundation's history. There are articles that the Foundation does not possess, and it acknowledges these omissions. The sources for these articles are predominately *The Commercial Appeal*, Memphis' metro newspaper, and *Living Blues*, a Mississippi-based magazine devoted to blues music. The archives do possess intermittent editions of European Blues magazines, *Blues Revue*, and the *King Biscuit Times*. The Blues Foundation acquired the majority of these articles on its own; former Executive Director, Joe Savarin, hired two employees to search for and clip articles pertaining to blues, Memphis, or the Foundation for storage and documentation. These articles are not organized, and must be laminated and stored according to topic, date, and publication (usually citing *Commercial Appeal*, *Living Blues*, and others). NEH preservation grant money would also provide for the actualization of a research system for news media.

Miscellaneous

While most of the archives fit neatly into these categories, there is another category that serves as the catch-all for the rest - miscellaneous. The Blues Foundation possesses banners from previous Handy Awards shows, posters, press releases, t-shirts, primary documents, and voting ballots. Although some of these items possess little archival value, posters and t-shirts can be purchased online by fans in order to further fund The Blues Foundation's various endeavors. One of each design has been framed and displayed with the guitars and photographs in the office. The primary documents, which include scripts of the Handy Awards and over one hundred artist contracts and releases, would be of value to the grant proposal and to anyone wanting to do research on the blues, especially its connection to Memphis. There are Blues Hall

of Fame awards that have not been collected by artists or their families upon or after induction. With such an extensive collection, The Blues Foundation possesses the potential to serve as an archival oasis for blues writers and fans from all over the world.

Future Activities

With these holdings and the hopes of receiving an NEH preservation grant, the big question becomes “What does the future hold for The Blues Foundation?” In order to answer that, one must appreciate the work being done at the present time because the future is contingent upon the work of today. Deciding to write a grant proposal became the catalyst for the resurrection of The Blues Foundation's archives and productivity in the blues community. The organization of the archive's thousands of photographs, cases of autographed guitars, memorabilia, and records has become part of this larger process. It is a job in itself, requiring tiresome hours of cataloguing and taking inventory. Although the process is frustrating because The Blues Foundation has been remiss in organizing them up to this point, any further delay would have made the task even more difficult. It is an incredibly significant task and a form of homage to those in the photographs, whose autographs cover those guitars, and whose music live through recordings.

All-Call

Not only is The Blues Foundation organizing what it has, for the first time in its history, the organization is conducting an all-call. This will occur as soon as the Foundation's archivist has organized its holdings sufficiently and is prepared to accept and properly store new material. It will take place before the grant writing process begins, providing The Blues Foundation with ample time to catalogue the new items. This all-call consists of contacting individuals or groups who may be interested in donating photographs, letters, music, or any other items that seem

appropriate for The Blues Foundation's archives. By stating its desire to create a strong research forum, the Foundation could gain the support of researchers and fans as well as its one hundred and thirty-five affiliated organizations world-wide. When discussing these endeavors with William Ferris, co-founder of The Center for Southern Folklore, former member of The Blues Foundation, and former head of the NEH, The Blues Foundation created a cardboard box theory that provides a great amount of optimism for its desire to acquire more holdings. The assumptions that comprise the theory are that if each affiliate has at least one cardboard box filled with photographs or memorabilia, of which they most-likely possess more, and they either donate it or copies of the photos, documents, or recordings to our cause, The Foundation's archives would gain international status as a strong resource for blues research as well as a strong contender for an NEH preservation grant. Although the influx of cardboard boxes could cripple The Blues Foundation's understaffed archival facilities, The Blues Foundation would graciously welcome such problems.

Also featured on the all-call list are photographers who have made contributions in the past and have left forwarding information with The Blues Foundation. The number of photographers has reached twenty-five. Similar to the cardboard box theory, if half of these photographers donate several good shots, the archives will flourish with new material and possess more professional photographs, whose quality will appeal to the NEH. Although photographers and affiliates may possess holdings of value, perhaps the best contacts would be the musicians themselves. In the event that these individuals are no longer living, their families may want to contribute. By calling upon those most closely connected with the blues, it not only provides material; it makes these individuals a part of the mission to preserve their own music and culture. Establishing communication with artists would not be difficult, given their growing

ages, waning popularity in the consumer market, and their probable location within the Delta. Partnerships with blues artists would only strengthen The Blues Foundation's ability to support blues music and its musicians.

While the professional all-call disseminates throughout the international blues circuits, reaching fans, locals, and those who are unaware of The Blues Foundation's goals would also provide potential support. In fact, simply mentioning the project has sparked local interest with musicians who have offered to attempt to identify the individuals who have not been identified in the photographs. The Blues Foundation's official website would also post a request for materials to strengthen its archives, listing an email address for digital photographs and a mailing address for other media, explaining the project to those interested. This form of advertisement would reach individuals who search for "blues" and other similar hits and would bring them into contact with the Foundation, whose website is simply www.blues.org. Even people who are not blues fans have given The Blues Foundation contact information of relatives or friends who have collections of recordings, Stevie Ray Vaughan photographs, and memorabilia that they would like to donate. They simply never knew who would want these items. In contacting these individuals through the all-call, The Blues Foundation hopes to attain these collections in order to preserve and display them. In return for their donations, The Blues Foundation would recognize them as donors and invite them to a reception to view the archives once the process has been completed.

Improving the Archives and Making Connections

Another important aspect of The Blues Foundation's future is the continued cataloguing and acquisition of items. Better footage of The Handy Awards, live blues performances, and photographs of the artists would be in the Foundation's best interest because upon receiving an

NEH grant, a non-profit can re-apply for a renewal of the grant in order to maintain the archives. The archives must continue to grow and to need funding. Annual all-calls may be in the Foundation's best interest as well, reaching those contacted in the first round and expanding its efforts to reach other organizations, musicians, and fans for support. Contacting blues newsletters and magazines, as well as *Living Blues*, and the *Commercial Appeal* would also benefit the archive's clippings section. The magazines may donate photographs that they have taken as well.

Making connections with festivals would be another way to strengthen the archives. By becoming involved with the King Biscuit Blues Festival, as well as the various national festivals listed at www.bluesfestivals.com and the international ones at <http://blues.about.com>, The Blues Foundation could obtain media credentials, including photo passes, to interview artists and to photograph artists' performances. Members of The Blues Foundation's staff usually attend blues festivals and represent the Foundation; however, the disposable shots from previous events have not provided professional-quality photographs for the archives. Attention to quality in the future would produce better documentation of blues festivals that The Blues Foundation attends. Perhaps a Memphis blues festival is also in the future of the Foundation. Rather than going to the artists, they could come to Memphis. In an attempt to become a more established and populated event, The Blues Foundation has moved the date of the Handy Awards as close as possible to the weekend of Memphis in May's Beale Street Music Festival, in hopes that it would draw more fans as well as musicians and celebrities.

The local music scene also deserves attention. Beale Street is the Mecca of the blues world, and artists who are talented enough to play music on Beale Street have earned places of honor in The Blues Foundation's archives. The Handy Awards do recognize deserving local

artists every year, by awarding them with Handy Awards in various categories. These musicians preserve the blues tradition and cause Memphis' tourism and entertainment district to thrive, making the city the spiritual blues capital of the world. Memphis blues musicians should be included among the ranks of famous blues musicians because they earn money, making them professionals, and they possess the potential to become blues legends, as many older blues artists have, even some posthumously. The national and international crowds watch the bands on Beale Street and buy their compact discs, take photographs, and return home to share their newly-found bands and music with people throughout the world. The impact that Memphis music makes globally should be similar in scale to the local recognition that these musicians receive. The Blues Foundation must make an effort to do so by walking up and down Beale Street throughout the week photographing and recording performances. In order to strengthen the history of Memphis for tomorrow, the present must be appreciated and, thus, well-documented.

Another local outlet that The Blues Foundation would like to connect with in the future is the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), one of whose chapters is located in Memphis. NARAS is an international organization known for sponsoring the GRAMMY awards. It is comprised of "musicians, producers, engineers and recording professionals dedicated to improving the quality of life and cultural conditions for music and its makers".²⁶ By partnering with an international organization devoted to similar causes, yet one better-known for it, The Blues Foundation could make a bid for a larger audience as well as for international support from the organization and its members. This relationship could also improve the Handy Awards, which are considered "the GRAMMY awards of blues music".²⁷ In turn, NARAS would benefit from its celebration of the roots of rock and roll, soul, and hip-hop

²⁶ GRAMMY.com: About Us 2005, 10 July 2005 <<http://www.grammy.com/about.aspx>>

²⁷ Nager, C3.

music because the blues would give NARAS a new approach to understanding contemporary music and a greater appreciation of the blues.

NEH Grant Proposal

While The Blues Foundation attempts to implement all of these future projects and goals, there is one outstanding and overarching project that remains - the NEH grant application process. The National Endowment for the Humanities, which "is an independent grant-making agency of the United States government dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities," provides organizations, similar to The Blues Foundation, with funding every year.²⁸ An NEH grant would provide the moneys to better assemble and house the archives, making The Blues Foundation into a potential research center for blues enthusiasts.

Applying for a grant is a task that takes an incredible amount of time, given the extensive application process. The NEH offers various grants for different purposes to eligible non-profits that are not federally funded. The grant program that The Blues Foundation has decided to apply for is the "Grants to Preserve and Create Access to Humanities Collections". This grant goes towards the preservation of collections that possess the potential to become intellectually beneficial to the public. Providing access to The Blues Foundation's archives falls under this category because it is centered around organizing and cataloguing photographs and recordings on account of their cultural value to the Mid-South as well as the rest of the world. Not only is The Blues Foundation preserving items, it is preserving a nineteenth and twentieth century lifestyle that is regionally, and in most cases, racially-specific. The lack of recognition given to the blues

²⁸ National Endowment for the Humanities: Who We Are March 2004, 20 May 2005
<<http://www.neh.gov/howeare/index.html>>

musicians who created this musical counterculture must be amended. The Blues Foundation has acknowledged its value and wants to provide access to such a collection, through audio and visual media. In some cases, the digitization of collections is necessary in order to make these images and recordings more accessible. The Blues Foundation owns a high-quality scanner that would make the transfer of images an easy and inexpensive one, simply hiring someone to scan the images and store them for presentation on the Foundation's website. Transferring recordings would require more equipment and time; however, with this grant, it is also quite possible.

The deadline for the grant application is July 15, 2006. The work has already begun because an inventory of what The Blues Foundation's archives possessed provided the Foundation with the confidence to move forward with the application process. A catalogue of the items is needed in order to inform the NEH of the collection's size, present condition, cultural significance, and future usage.²⁹ The Blues Foundation also needs a model collection for comparison because the model will give the Foundation a better idea of what needs to be done and how to organize its materials. Program officers from the Division of Preservation and Access will provide advice, copies of successful applications for assistance during the process, and evaluations of the narrative and budget sections prior to the official deadlines. The narrative section consists of a twenty-five page, single-spaced paper, including a detailed catalogue and the staff's experience with similar projects. The budget portion, which will be headed by The Blues Foundation's current Executive Director, Jay Sieleman, requires a more extensive explanation of the collection along with the estimated cost of the project, outside contractors, and equipment needed for project maintenance. In regards to purchasing equipment, the NEH requires that the grant applicants keep their purchases consistent with the Buy American Act that

²⁹ Grant Programs: National Endowment for the Humanities 2004, 20 May 2005
<<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pcahc.html>>

permits grant money to only go towards American-made equipment and products. There is a budget form that The Blues Foundation must complete, including information on travel costs, overhead, salaries and wages, consultation fees, services, supplies and materials, as well as any other costs that will go into the total cost of the project.³⁰

Precision and enthusiasm will be the ultimate factors of success throughout the grant writing process because the NEH reviewers require precision. Enthusiasm about the task at hand and the potential of attaining an NEH grant will make the proposal stronger. If The Blues Foundation is fortunate enough to receive a preservation grant from the NEH, the next step would be to manage the funds and archives appropriately. Consultants may work with the staff on developing the project or allocating funds properly. Grant management during the first year will determine whether or not the NEH will renew the grant, if The Blues Foundation decides to reapply for more funding after the first award ends. Housing and organizing the archives in a manner that is easily accessible for researchers would also be an important step. While there is an entire lower level of The Blues Foundation offices that could be used as the research center, acquiring a new space for the archives is also an option. Converting the basement may be the only economically-feasible facility for the first year or more.

Housing for Archives and Blues Museum

Obtaining a new building would give The Blues Foundation an opportunity to do something that it has always wanted to do - establish a Blues Hall of Fame. In conjunction with the archives, memorabilia, and offices, The Blues Foundation could create a blues hub, which would incorporate all of its activities and become a location for tourists to visit when they come

³⁰ National Endowment for the Humanities: Budget Information, Instructions, and Forms 2004, 26 June 2005 <<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pdf/budgetform.pdf>>

to Memphis to experience blues music and Southern culture. Establishing what would essentially be a blues museum in Memphis would not only be a culturally-significant addition; it could bring in more tourists and contribute to The Blues Foundation's annual revenue. Financial support for such a museum could come from groups, individuals, or the blues community and assist The Blues Foundation in becoming a better-known entity with more to offer. It would solidify The Blues Foundation's location in Memphis. Other cities may no longer attempt to lure the organization away from its home with promises of money, space, or recognition. The desire to create a blues hub in Memphis would also resonate with other local entities, such as NARAS, Stax, the Rock & Soul Museum, Beale Street, Sun Studios, the Civil Rights Museum, and Graceland. The international success of blues and its connection to rock and roll, soul, and the African-American community would potentially bring in more tourists, events, research projects, and local support as the final link in a chain of Memphis preservation success stories. It is also the most long-awaited. This victory for blues music, Memphis, and The Blues Foundation would all revolve around the first step- the NEH grant award. Once the process begins, support and progress will follow. It is simply a matter of getting beyond the first step. The NEH grant proposal and the organization and acquisition of media for the archives would serve as the catalyst and aid The Blues Foundation in its desire to recognize and celebrate the blues. While the blues museum may still be a long-term goal, the archival work that has begun has given The Blues Foundation a revived sense of optimism.

Another resource that The Blues Foundation may propose to use to house the archives during the transition period is Rhodes College's Paul W. Barret, Jr. Library. Recently completed and equipped with staff and space, it possesses the potential to assist The Blues Foundation in its endeavors. The primary reason that Rhodes College has become an option is its summer

Institute for Regional Studies. This program, funded by the benevolence of the Priddy Trust, is a project that provides students with summer research funding, support, and mentors in return for in-depth research on topics that are significant to the Delta region. The connection to The Blues Foundation was formed when an art-history student and a music professor collaborated on this project during the 2005 regional studies program and planned to continue their work throughout the academic year with the hope of obtaining an NEH grant for The Blues Foundation.

Receiving the NEH grant and temporarily storing the archives at Rhodes College would signify the success of the collaboration as well as the Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies program in the culmination of a project that preserved an essential portion of Memphis history.

Exhibitions

Other future projects that could derive from the archival project could focus on displaying the best of the collection for public view and appreciation. Rhodes College houses an art gallery, as does The University of Memphis. Two possibilities exist, given the permission of the photographers, for celebrating the establishment and organization of The Blues Foundation's archives. Other art galleries in Memphis and throughout the region may also be interested in featuring part of the collection for a period of time. The Stax Museum in Memphis reserves a portion of its gallery for specialized exhibits and may want to honor the roots of soul music through a blues retrospective exhibit. Another outlet is the Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Given its extensive collection and ties to Memphis blues music, the images and subject matter would correspond quite well. If these options do not materialize, The Blues Foundation could always obtain a space to exhibit the highlights of its collection during the week of the Handy Awards. Such an exhibit may interest more musicians, fans, and celebrities to attend the awards show and to support The Blues Foundation's efforts to preserve blues music.

While the future of The Blues Foundation is immeasurable and incredibly optimistic, the NEH grant is the factor that will actualize this process of growth and preservation. The city of Memphis' desire to revitalize and to preserve itself began over twenty years ago with the renovation of the Downtown district, including Beale Street. The establishment of The Blues Foundation also played a major role in the city's and the blues genre's desire to gain local, national, and international respect. National funding, a strong research collection, and an entertainment district centered around blues music could interest researchers, filmmakers, musicians, locals, and fans to take more of an interest in a genre that is essential to all other genres of music. The Blues Foundation's archives could secure such interest and earn for itself the well-deserved respect of a non-profit organization devoted to the preservation of American culture. It is the responsibility of The Blues Foundation to strive for funding and recognition, while it is the responsibility of the NEH to acknowledge such a deserving organization and cause.

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