



The Mt. Zion Memorial Fund

FOR BLUES, MUSIC, AND JUSTICE

1164 John Street
Greenville, MS 38703



JANUARY 12, 2023

Office of U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson
2466 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Congressman Thompson,

I am writing to inform you of our efforts to preserve the Glen Allan juke joint that popular recording artist Alonzo Chatmon built prior to World War II. It is the only such structure still standing in the rural Delta from that period, largely due to the efforts of Ollie Morganfield, property owner and nephew of blues artist Muddy Waters. By acknowledging and maintaining historic resources in Mississippi's African American communities, we hope to capitalize on the transformative potential of responsible research and historic preservation policies in the Delta.

The Mt. Zion Memorial Fund (MZMF) for Blues, Music, and Justice is one of several organizations that received development grants from MS DELTA NHA in 2023, but our matching grant award of \$59,000 from the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MS DELTA NHA) and National Park Service gives us the chance to accomplish something that historic preservationists never really thought possible. Thus, we wanted to thank you for supporting the National Heritage Areas and National Park Service, and we wanted to invite you to visit us, or meet with us, and discuss how we can prevent the erasure of endangered historic resources and better serve the people of Mississippi.

The MS DELTA NHA grant provides seed money for a unique historic preservation project, one unlike any other ever attempted at the Mississippi Blues Commission, which installed over 100 historic markers. Many blues trail markers stand on empty plots of land, where historic structures once stood proudly and served as important social and cultural landscapes for the Black experience in Mississippi. Many homes and churches where early Blues artists developed their talents no longer exist, and not a single juke joint that operated in pre-World War II Mississippi remains standing. In January 2022, our research revealed that one such juke joint remains standing in Glen Allan, and we plan to not only prevent its erasure but disseminate the inspiring story of this rare historic gem as broadly as possible.

The MS DELTA NHA grant funds the historic preservation assessment of the site and the writing of a report and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. It also provides the evidentiary basis for future grant proposals and other fundraising opportunities to preserve the structure and tell its story. In the early 1940s, African American fiddle player and recording artist

Alonzo Chatmon purchased a small plot of land in Glen Allan for \$400. He also built a modest structure to conduct business and showcase the deep well of musical talent amongst African Americans in the Delta. In the mid-1940s, he sold the plot, the structure, and its contents for \$3,000.

Annie Spencer purchased the property and operated a community store on the site until the 1990s, when the nephew of blues artist Muddy Waters, Ollie Morganfield, came calling and purchased it. Realizing that the wooden frame remained strong, he replaced the damaged roof and dilapidated siding, and it has served as a community and recreation center in Glen Allan for more than twenty years.

No other historic resource in the state has as much potential to redress the legacy of slavery and segregation (resource hoarding) and stop the continual erasure of cultural resources in African American communities. This project will have a positive impact on Mr. Morganfield's capacity for historic preservation, his ability to retain ownership of the property, and his power to control how the community benefits from the property. It also offers a unique resource for the towns of Glen Allan and the Delta region, and it breaks sharply with previous policies that led to the destruction of historic Black communities and resources.

Event Invitation:

On behalf of the Mt. Zion Memorial Fund (MZMF) for Blues, Music, and Justice, I would like to invite you to attend the dedication of a memorial to blues artist Jim Jackson at Hernando Memorial Cemetery on June 3 at 5:00 pm CST. I also invite you to attend the installation of a historic marker at St. James Cemetery in Carroll County on June 4 at 5:00 pm CST. In addition, I'd encourage you to visit the property of Ollie Morganfield in Glen Allan, a small, yet vibrant and active, community that sits on picturesque Lake Washington.

To RSVP and for more information, please contact Corey Crowder at (662)701-7802, or email: corey@mtzionmemorialfund.org.

Sincerely,

Tyler DeWayne Moore
Executive Director, Mt. Zion Memorial Fund