

# STATE OF MISSISSIPPI



A

## PROCLAMATION

BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
AND REPRESENTATIVE GREGORY L. HOLLOWAY, SR., COMMENDING THE CAREER  
AND LEGACY OF MISSISSIPPI BLUES LEGEND TOMMY JOHNSON ON THE OCCASION OF  
BEING HONORED DURING THE COOPER'S DOWN BLUES FESTIVAL IN TERRY, MISSISSIPPI,  
AND HIS INDUCTION INTO THE PARAMOUNT WALK OF FAME IN GRAFTON, WISCONSIN

WHEREAS, legendary and one of Mississippi's most famous Blues musicians, Tommy Johnson, who was born in 1896 to a large musical family in Terry, Mississippi, will be honored at two festivals on September 17-18, 2010, the first festival will be held in his native home of Terry at Cooper's Down, followed by a second honorary acknowledgment in Grafton, Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, as part of the Paramount Blues Festival in Grafton on September 18, 2010, Johnson will be inducted into the Paramount Walk of Fame and the two events will coincide to bring public awareness to the contributions Johnson made to the Blues genre, as well as to make acknowledgment of Paramount Records' importance as a major recording studio for African-American Blues and Jazz artists in the 1920s and 1930s with the presentation of a "Mississippi Blues Trail" marker; and

WHEREAS, credited with telling the tale of "selling his soul to the Devil" to become a great musician, Johnson was taught the rudiments of guitar playing by his brother, LeDell, with whom he and his other brother, Mager, supplemented their sharecropping income by playing for parties in Crystal Springs, Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, in 1916, Tommy married Maggie Bidwell and moved to Webb Jennings' Plantation near Drew, in the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta region close to Dockery's Plantation, where his talent was honed after falling captive to music's spell, favoring the musical nomenclature and stylings of Charley Patton, Willie Brown, Dick Bankston and Ben Maree; and

WHEREAS, returning home from the Delta a refined musician and resuming his musical partnership with Mager and LeDell, his guitar techniques were polished and persuasive as he astonished audiences with new music, allowing his influential Mississippi Delta Blues man artistry to catapult him during the late 1920s to recording status which lent itself to the distinctive and sultry style of the Mississippi Delta; and

WHEREAS, in February 1928 at the Memphis Auditorium, Tommy made his first recordings with guitarist Charlie McCoy for Victor Records, which were so well-received that they prompted a follow-up recording in August 1928, which yielded the notorious *Canned Heat Blues*, in which he sang of drinking methanol from the cooking fuel, Sterno; and

WHEREAS, Johnson traveled to Paramount's studio in Grafton, Wisconsin, where Delta luminaries, Son House, Skip James and Charley Patton had also recorded, and where in December 1929, he would wax *Alcohol and Jake Blues* in what would become his final recording session for the Paramount label, which lost its fervency after the onset of the Great Depression and the decreased enthusiasm of the record-buying public; and

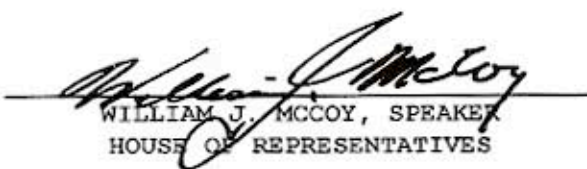
WHEREAS, Johnson's recordings showcased an eerie falsetto and masterfully manipulated vocal dynamics that established him as the premier Delta Blues vocalist of his day, and to enhance his fame, he cultivated a sinister persona similar to that of St. Louis bluesman Peetie Wheatstraw, the self-styled "Devil's Son-in-law"; and

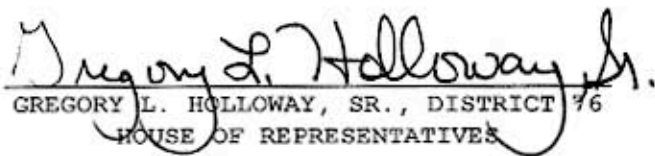
WHEREAS, known in his former and posthumous years as an eccentric conjurer, with a proclivity for "clowning" with his guitar, Johnson, who succumbed to a heart attack after playing at a party on November 1, 1956, was given recognition by a group of young musicians, Canned Heat, who named their group after his classic song that bears the same namesake; in 1986, he was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame as a performer and recognized again in 1987 for his classic blues recording, *Big Road Blues*; and on Friday, October 19, 2007, the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Heritage Trails Program, the Mississippi Blues Commission, the City of Crystal Springs, and the Tommy Johnson Blues Foundation unveiled a "Mississippi Blues Trail" marker in his honor; and

WHEREAS, it is with great pride that the House of Representatives notes these landmark events in honor of a great Mississippi musician who contributed to the musical legacy of Mississippi and brought honor to the state:

NOW, THEREFORE, on behalf of the House of Representatives of the State of Mississippi, we do hereby commend the career and legacy of Mississippi Blues Legend Tommy Johnson on the occasion of being honored during the Cooper's Down Blues Festival in Terry, Mississippi, and his induction into the Paramount Walk of Fame in Grafton, Wisconsin, and extend greetings to all participants in these auspicious events.

THIS the 17th day of September, 2010.

  
WILLIAM J. MCCOY, SPEAKER  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

  
GREGORY L. HOLLOWAY, SR., DISTRICT 76  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES