

## HENRY SLOAN Founder of the delta blues? 1870 - ?

There are no known photographs or recordings of Sloan. This mysterious forefather and likely founder of the delta blues taught Charley Patton everything he knew. Located in the heart of the Delta, Clarksdale Mississippi has been dubbed the birthplace of the Blues, with the exact spot attributed to the Dockery Plantation. Many sharecropping families and field workers occupied this space, including one Henry Sloan. He was a popular singer and guitarist by the 1900s. He was also a mentor to many future legends, including Charley Patton, Tommy Johnson, Willie Brown, and the great Robert Johnson. All of whom claimed him as their teacher and as the originator of what became the delta blues style.

*Very little is known about Sloan or  
his life other than the fact  
that he lived at Dockery Farms.  
Even his date of death is a mystery*

Sloan was the musician W.C. Handy heard playing guitar at a train station near Dockery Farms in 1903. In his autobiography, Handy wrote that “a lean, loose-jointed Negro had commenced plucking a guitar beside me while I slept. His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar. The effect was unforgettable. The singer repeated the line “Goin’ where the Southern cross the Dog” three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard.” **Larry Watt**