

CHARLIE PATTON - Father of the Delta Blues

This is the only known photograph of Charlie Patton, the Founding Father of Delta Blues. But, how many people know his name compared to the superstars of the blues that have become household names.

Everyone knows Robert Johnson invented the blues, right? Well, not according to history. It seems that when names have to be left out for whatever reason, accessibility, simplicity, parsimony, Patton's is amongst the first to go. References to him in popular culture have



to

been fairly restricted to appreciation amongst blues musicians and fans until recent years. Patton was born in 1891 to Bill and Annie Patton, who lived in Mississippi, east of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River. He was a mixture of African-American, White-American and Cherokee Indian. The Pattons sought a better life by relocating to the Dockery sawmill and cotton plantation, near Indianola. Patton spent much of his early life with the Chatmon family, where he absorbed the foundations of his singing and playing style from mainly living with the Chatmons. Charlie's quest to find a more meaningful music led him to the plantation's bluesmen. One of their number was Henry Sloan, an innovator of the Delta blues way of playing. He began teaching Charlie about 1905. Their playing together lasted for several years. Charlie was a small man standing 5 foot 5 inches tall and around 135 pounds. He married eight or so times, had many affairs, a heavy smoker and did a lot of drinking. Patton never worked much on Dockery's Plantation, but he lived on and around the farm throughout the rest of his life, earning a good living playing the blues, for both white and black audiences at parties hosted by Dockery. There is hardly a town in the Delta where

he is not recalled. His travels took him east and west to Georgia and Texas, south to Jackson, Vicksburg, Natchez, and New Orleans, and north to Memphis, St. Louis and Chicago. Between 1929 and 1934 Charlie Patton recorded over 50 titles which sold exceptionally well and catapulted him to relative stardom. His style was formed by listening to the older blues singers around Dockery Farms. He had a superb touch on the guitar and mastery of the subtleties of tone and timing. He served as a mentor and role model for many other Delta bluesmen, including Willie Brown, Son House and Robert Johnson. Patton's is the earliest blues recording that we have, and the oldest recording of true Delta blues. I have only provided a glimpse of the depth and richness of his life story.

Larry Watt