



CHICAGO'S HAD THE BLUES SO LONG, IT NEEDS A TIMELINE

1915:

The “Generation 1915” blues artists, including David “Honeyboy” Edwards, Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim, Johnny Shines, Eddie Boyd, Floyd McDaniel, Josh White, Brownie McGhee, and Robert Jr. Lockwood, are born. (p. 56)

1930s:

The blues thrive on Maxwell Street, the open air market considered the creative cradle of the genre in Chicago. (p. 82)

1935:

Vocalist Koko Taylor (Cora Walton) is born near Memphis, Tennessee, on September 28. (p. 202)

1936:

Legendary slide guitarist Robert Johnson records “Sweet Home Chicago.” Chicago already has a flourishing blues scene with such stars as Big Bill Broonzy, Tampa Red, Lonnie Johnson, Memphis Minnie, and Sonny Boy (John Lee) Williamson. (p. 1)

Guitarist George “Buddy” Guy is born in Lettsworth, Louisiana, on July 30. (p. 159)

1940:

RCA opens a recording studio in Chicago. (p. 80)

Post-World War II:

Chicago blues becomes a worldwide force with the arrival of Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, Howlin’ Wolf, and other innovative musicians from the Mississippi Delta area. (p. 1)

1947:

Leonard and Phil Chess, then nightclub owners, purchase Aristocrat Records (71st Street and Phillips). (p. 66)

1950s:

Chicago’s blues clubs are clustered on the South and West sides of the city. Patrons are African-Americans, typically recent arrivals in Chicago from the southern states looking for those down-home blues. (p. 5)

Leonard and Phil Chess move Aristocrat Records to 49th and Cottage Grove and change the name to Chess Records. Through the 1950s nearly every major blues musician in Chicago record for the Chess label. (p. 66)

1951:

The Chess brothers launch the Checker label. (p. 66)

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1953:

Vee-Jay (a.k.a., VJ) is founded in 1953 by Vivian Carter and her husband, Jimmy Bracken. Vee-Jay will be the first American label to issue songs by the Beatles. (p. 92)

1954:

Chess establishes its song publishing company, Arc Music. (p. 66)

1956:

Argo (later called Cadet), a jazz-oriented subsidiary of Arc, is created. (p. 66)

1957:

The Chess brothers buy a Michigan Avenue building that had once housed a furniture slipcover factory. They remodel the interior and install state-of-the-art recording equipment. The studio, later known as Tel-Mar, is acoustically designed to retain the characteristic Chess echo sound. (p. 66)

1964:

In June, the Rolling Stones make their first trip to Chicago. In a two-day session at Chess Studios, they record such hits as “It’s All Over Now,” “Confessin’ the Blues,” and the song that immortalized the address of Chess: “2120 S. Michigan Ave.” (p. 66)

Mid-1960s:

Recording companies Chess, Vee-Jay, Crash, One-derful, ABC/Paramount, United, Bamboo, and Constellation are located on a 15-block stretch of Michigan Avenue south of Roosevelt Road that becomes known as Record Row. Because Chicago has played a key role in blues recording since the early 1930s, the city is a logical place for the development of so-called race records—labels specializing in African-American music such as gospel, jazz, and blues. (p. 91)

The Jazz Record Mart becomes a magnet for white blues fans, who come to Chicago from all over the country. Owner Bob Koester is also founder of Delmark Records, known for its extensive and groundbreaking blues and jazz catalogs. Delmark plays a vital role in documenting the work of talented, innovative blues and jazz musicians. (p. 76; p. 93)

1966:

The Chess brothers move their offices to a larger facility at 320 E. 21st Street and expand their R&B and gospel offerings. (p. 66)

1969:

Leonard Chess dies. The Chess label is sold to General Recorded Tape (GRT). (pp. 66–67)

An all-day concert called “Bringing the Blues Back Home” is held at the Grant Park band shell on 11th Street on August 30, 1969: The ten-hour show draws more than 10,000 people. (p. 55)

1970s:

The sounds of R&B, soul, and Motown begin outpacing the blues in popularity among African-American fans, and many clubs close. The demographics of blues fans start to shift due to the “rediscovery” of the blues by British rock bands. Increasingly, white fans begin searching for the blues. Blues clubs begin opening on the North Side, specifically in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. The Elsewhere Club, Wise Fool’s Pub, Kingston Mines, and B.L.U.E.S. are within blocks of each other, earning the area the nickname of Blues Alley. (p. 6; p. 8)

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1972:

Buddy Guy and his partner L.C. Thurman open the Checkerboard Lounge on the South Side. (p. 6–7)

23-Year-old Bruce Iglauer starts Alligator Records. (p. 94–95)

1978:

Michael Frank forms Earwig Music. (p. 98–99)

1980s:

Willie Dixon founds the Blues Heaven Foundation to promote the blues, assist musicians, and educate young people. He wants to purchase the Chess building, which has lain vacant for years, for the foundation's headquarters. (p. 67–68)

1981:

The Chicago Blues Archives begins at the Chicago Public Library (400 S. State Street) when radio station WXRT donates recordings from its *Blues Breakers* specials. (p. 69)

1983:

Harold Washington becomes Chicago's first African-American mayor on April 29. (p. 54)

Muddy Waters dies on April 30. (p. 54)

Chicagofest, the city's annual 12-day summer festival of food and entertainment, begun in 1978, comes to an end. (p. 54)

1984:

The first Chicago Blues Festival takes place. (p. 55)

1985:

MCA Records obtains the Chess masters. Most of the songs will be reissued on CD. Ch. (p. 67)

1989:

Buddy Guy opens Legends (754 S. Wabash). (p. 21)

1990:

The City of Chicago names the Chess Studios building a landmark on May 16. (p. 67)

1991:

Chicago native Gregg Parker, a musician, producer, and historian, founds the Chicago Blues Museum (3636 S. Iron Street). (p. 70)

1992:

Willie Dixon dies before achieving his dream of turning the old Chess building into the Blues Heaven Foundation headquarters. (p. 68)

The Maxwell Street Historical Preservation Association is formed. (p. 83)

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1993:

Marie Dixon, widow of Willie, fulfills her late husband's vision by buying the Michigan Avenue building and donating it to the Blues Heaven Foundation. (p. 68)

1994:

Maxwell Street Market is closed and moved a few blocks east to Canal Street, where it operates today. (p. 83)

1995:

The Chicago Blues Festival celebrates Generation 1915, the group of blues legends born in 1915. (p. 56)

1997:

The historic Chess building is restored and opened to the public. (p. 68)

1999:

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visits the Checkerboard Lounge. The club has gained fame worldwide, with people coming from all over the world to see the blues there. (p. 6–7)

Muddy Waters's house (4339 S. Lake Park, Westmont, IL) receives a Chicago Tribute Marker of Distinction. (p. 87)

2005:

Cass Avenue, in Westmont, IL, is dedicated as Honorary Muddy Waters Way. (p. 90)

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