

THE WEST VIRGINIA **Blues** SOCIETY, **inc.**

www.wvbluessociety.org

P.O. Box 11646, Charleston, West Virginia 25339

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TO ALL MEDIA

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WVBS Honors West Virginia Blues Legend

Not many people know who “Diamond Teeth” Mary McClain was. But, she was one of the most famous entertainers to ever come from the Mountain State – an African-American blues singer referred to as “*Queen of The Blues*” long before Koko Taylor was even born. The West Virginia Blues Society (WVBS), a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of blues music in West Virginia will honor “**Diamond Teeth” Mary** at a special “Blues Night Out” to be held at **The V-Club** in Mary’s hometown of Huntington, WV, on Sunday, August 31, 2008. (www.vclublive.com)

WVBS “Blues Night Out” promotions are being held around the state to introduce the society, its goals, and to sign up music fans as new members. Each “Blues Night Out” (BNO) features quality live blues music, lots of door prizes, a raffle, 50/50 drawing, special event specific t-shirts for sale, all to add up to a fun night, while celebrating one of America’s few truly unique art forms – the blues. Before Huntington, the WVBS has held “Blues Night Out” in Fairmont, New Martinsville, Elkins

and Wheeling, with more planned for other cities and towns around the state.

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“Blues Night Out” at **The V-Club** will be a special “Proclamation Celebration” to honor Huntington’s own “Diamond Teeth” Mary McClain, and will feature 2 blues bands: *Liz Pennock & Dr. Blues*, from St. Petersburg, Florida, who toured with Mary before she died, and *C&S Railroad*, local blues favorites who are regular players at **The V-Club**. WV Governor Joe Manchin and Huntington Mayor Fellington have both issued proclamations naming **Sunday, August 31, 2008 “Diamond Teeth Mary McClain Day”** in Huntington, and all of West Virginia. Doors at **The V-Club** will open at 4PM, music starts at 5PM with *C&S Railroad*, and the proclamation presentation will take place at 6PM. There will be **complimentary BBQ** on the patio, and music will continue as late as people and time permit. Tickets are \$10 and available at www.etix.com

Mary Smith McClain was born on August 27, 1902. She was an African-American blues singer and entertainer.

Better known as “Walking Mary” and later “Diamond Teeth Mary,” she was born in Huntington, West Virginia. Mary McClain was the half-sister of Bessie Smith (Smith’s mother was one of Mary’s four stepmothers.) At the age of 13, young McClain couldn’t stand the beatings any longer and left home in her brother’s clothes. It

was Mary's own skills as an acrobat and singer that enabled her to survive.

McClain spent the 1920's and 1930's performing in a variety of medicine and minstrel shows. She toured with the USO and sang at the Apollo Theater, The Cotton Club, and at the White House, where her show-stopping charisma received standing ovations. Night spots from Boston to Miami billed her as "Queen of the Blues" and she shared billings with her sister Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Big Mama Thornton, Ray Charles, Charlie Parker, Nat King Cole, Count Basie and Duke Ellington. McClain lived with baseball great Satchel Paige, and was never short on stories about her life and times. During the 1940's, McClain had diamonds removed from a bracelet and set into her upper and lower front teeth, creating a dazzling stage effect. The diamonds earned McClain her nickname.

The music industry was never kind to "**Diamond Teeth Mary**", but she managed to perform and make a living for 85 years without its help. "**Diamond Teeth**" **Mary McClain**, 98, died on April 4, 2000. As she wanted, her ashes were sprinkled on the railroad tracks at Huntington, West Virginia, where she hopped her first train. Her gowns are in the Florida State Museum and the Memphis Blues Museum. In Miami, Tobacco Road named the performing room upstairs the "Diamond Teeth Mary Cabaret" in her honor.

The day will be a celebration of the blues and **“Diamond Teeth” Mary**. It will also be the kick-off for fund-raising efforts by the **WVBS** towards purchasing, erecting and dedicating a permanent highway marker in the style of *“The Mississippi Blues Trail”* at Huntington’s old train station, where her ashes were scattered. This would be the first of what is hoped to be many markers **The West Virginia Blues Society** will place throughout the state, recognizing WV blues artists. Also, the **WVBS** will be trying to rally supporters in favor of her induction into *The WV Music Hall of Fame* in 2009.

“Diamond Teeth” Mary McClain Day

The V-Club, Huntington, WV**

Sunday, August 31, 2008

The Schedule of Events

4PM – Doors Open

5PM – 6PM – C&S Railroad

-- Featuring members of The Huntington Harmonica Club

6PM – 7PM -- Program

■ Proclamation from Gov. Manchin

■ Proclamation by Mayor Fellington

■ Other noted guests share thoughts

7PM – 9PM -Liz Pennock & Dr. Blues

from St. Petersburg, Florida

9PM - ?? -- AFTERJAM – Local Blues Players

**** Location is corner of 6th Avenue and 8th Street**