

## Kicking off “Celebrate the 65th” at the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park!

In 1947, the process of re-envisioning the stately Victorian mansion of former Virginia Attorney General and local industrial investor Rufus Ayers as the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was well on its way. James True, the first curator of the Museum, worked to develop the original collection, providing the story of Southwest Virginia and its inhabitants through one-of-a-kind items placed on display. The year leading up to the dedication of the park on May 30th, 1948, was a year of creative rethinking of spaces in the home while maintaining the striking exterior of locally-quarried and hand-chiseled sandstone and limestone and the awe-inspiring interior designs of native red oak.

The story of transforming the Ayers mansion into a museum begins with the building’s purchase by Lee County native, member of Congress, and private secretary of President Calvin Coolidge, C. Bascom Slemple, in 1929. The Museum’s original collection formed from the collection of the Janie Slemple Newman Museum, whose items were collected by C. Bascom and his sister, Janie Slemple Newman. Before C. Bascom's death in 1943, he established The Slemple Foundation, and it was his wish that the Commonwealth acquire the Ayers' home for a museum and that the Janie Slemple Newman collection be given to the state for the new museum. Acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1946, the Ayers home became the site of the collection donated by the Slemple Foundation, and the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was officially dedicated by the state on May 30th, 1948.

The Museum’s staff work with the history of Southwest Virginia on a daily basis while also creating exciting new programs and events that explore the historic and cultural resources of Southwest Virginia. In developing a new year of programs--and seeking to celebrate the Museum’s roots and longevity in the community and beyond--we wanted to kick off the celebration of the Museum’s **65th year** with the **2012 “Gathering in the Gap” Music Festival, featuring Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives!** Following the festival, the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park will offer a year of “Celebrate the 65th” kickoff programming to culminate in another special “Gathering in the Gap” Music Festival in May, 2013. Join us for events and programs all year long to “Celebrate the 65th” and learn what makes the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park *your* Museum!