

Celebrate the 65th Anniversary of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park!



Memorial Day Weekend in 2013 marks the 65th anniversary of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park. The park tailored programming in 2012 to prepare for this momentous occasion, and it's nearing the big day! To celebrate the 65th year operating within the community and reaching visitors from all over, we have planned a very special **“Gathering in the Gap” Music Festival, featuring John Carter Cash, Mountain Heart, Dale Jett & Hello Stranger, and Dave Eggar & Deoro.** The park will also induct new members into the Southwest Virginia Walk of Fame in the afternoon of Gathering in the Gap. Staff cannot express enough what loyal volunteers and community leaders provide to the site, but we are certain that **65 years would not have been possible without you!**

History of the 65th: 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 Slep, in 1929. The Museum's original collection formed from the collection of the Janie Slep Newman Museum, whose items were collected by C. Bascom and his sister, Janie Slep Newman. Before C. Bascom's death in 1943, he established The Slep Foundation, and it was his wish that the Commonwealth acquire the Ayers' home for a museum and that the Janie Slep Newman collection be given to the state. Acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1946, the Ayers home became the site of the collection donated by the Slep Foundation, and the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was officially dedicated by the state on May 30th, 1948.