

VLR 9/11/02  
NR 11/22/02

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park  
other names/site number Rufus A. Ayers House; VDHR file no. 101-0002

**2. Location**

street & number 10 West First Street North N/A not for publication  
city or town Big Stone Gap N/A vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Wise code 195 zip code 24219

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X nationally X statewide X locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date 11/22/02

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
\_\_\_ entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	2	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
RECREATION AND CULTURE	museum

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure
RECREATION AND CULTURE	museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Stone
walls	Stone
roof	Asphalt
other	Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past fifty years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1895-1952

Significant Dates

1895
1948

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Slemp, Campbell Bascom
Ayers, Rufus Augustus

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Johnson, Charles Ralph, Sr.
Campbell, Edmund Schureman

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** approximately 1 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	17	341300	4081000	3 17
2	17			4 17

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title	<u>J. Daniel Pezzoni</u>	date	<u>July 9, 2002</u>
organization	<u>Landmark Preservation Associates</u>	telephone	<u>(540) 464-5315</u>
street & number	<u>6 Houston St.</u>	zip code	<u>24450</u>
city or town	<u>Lexington</u> state <u>VA</u>		

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	<u>Commonwealth of Virginia (contact: Janet H. Blevins, Park Manager,</u>			
	<u>Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park)</u>			
street & number	<u>PO Box 742</u>	telephone	<u>(276) 523-1322</u>	
city or town	<u>Big Stone Gap</u>	state	<u>Virginia</u>	zip code <u>24219</u>

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

The Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park, also known as the Rufus A. Ayers House, stands at 10 West First Street North in the Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, Virginia (see Exhibit A). According to tax records and other sources, the house was built in 1894-95. In 1946 the house was acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia and two years later it was opened as a museum. The house is two and a half stories in height and five bays in width, and it is constructed of brown sandstone on a limestone basement story. The house is essentially Queen Anne in style, although its original appearance has been altered by the loss of a wraparound veranda and modifications to the roof in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Exterior features include stoops on the northeast front and northwest side elevations, an asphalt-shingled hip roof with gabled projections and pedimented dormers, and a two-and-a-half-story rear service wing with a basement story. The interior is arranged around an L-shaped hall and is distinguished by mantels, staircases, door and window surrounds, and paneled ceilings of natural-finish red oak (see Exhibit B). Two Italian marble mantels were added about 1930 and built-in exhibits and other upgrades were made in the early 1990s. Behind the house stands a two-story carriage house of painted brick construction, presumably built in 1894-95, that is now used for collections storage. The landscaped grounds are enclosed by an original stone wall. The house occupies the crest of a terrace overlooking downtown Big Stone Gap in a neighborhood known as Poplar Hill, historically the town's most prestigious residential area. The nominated area consists of the northeast half of city block no. 52, comprising approximately one acre of land, and is bounded by West 1st Street North on the northeast, Wood Avenue (US Highway Alternate 58) on the southeast, an alley on the southwest, and Shawnee Avenue on the northwest. Visible in all directions are the thickly wooded slopes of mountains including Stone Mountain with elevations in excess of 3,000 feet above sea level (the house itself stands at approximately 1,500 feet). The Powell River, a tributary of the Tennessee and Mississippi river systems, flows a short distance to the northwest.

### Inventory

1. Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park.  
1894-95; late 1940s; early 1990s. Contributing building.
2. Carriage house. Ca. 1894; 1994-95. Contributing building.
3. Maintenance Buildings 1 and 2. Ca. 2000. Noncontributing building.
4. Maintenance Building 3. Ca. 2000. Noncontributing building.

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Description (continued)

House Exterior

The defining feature of the Southwest Virginia Museum is its construction of dark brown quarry-faced Rose Hill Formation sandstone. Contrasting with the rough overall appearance of the stonework are a number of refinements. The stones forming the corners of the main section of the house and the service wing are pecked with diagonal lines or hatching that accentuate the stones and suggest quoining. The window lintels and sills are smooth, there are several narrow belt courses of patent-hammered stone, and there is a course above the level of the first-story window lintels formed by quarry-faced and hatched stones with patent-hammered borders. A number of quarry-faced and hatched stones were used to fill an opening on the second-story of the southeast elevation associated with a bay window that was probably removed in the late 1940s. The round-arched fanlight over the front second-story entry has a quarry-faced keystone and voussoir stones. The basement is constructed of cream-gray quarry-faced limestone with a projecting top course.

The front entry is reached by stone steps that rise to a concrete platform-like stoop. The steps have flared stone cheeks with stone newels at their lower ends. The newels are square in section and angled with incised panels and domed caps. The corners of the platform are defined by piers of cushion-like quarry-faced gray stone with smooth bases and caps. These piers are the pedestals of stone pillars that once supported a two-tier front portico. The portico formerly linked to a wraparound one-story veranda that stood on similar stone pillars and that spanned a moat-like well surrounding the basement elevations. (The veranda is gone but the moat remains, with a stone retaining wall and concrete floor.) The stoop also has balustrades with thick stylized vasiform wood balusters reused from the former veranda. An interesting feature left over from the veranda is a series of U-shaped iron joist hangers attached to the top basement course.

The front entry itself features a double-leaf natural-finish door under a rectangular transom painted with the title "Southwest Virginia Museum." The door leaves have glass panels framed by narrow fluted Ionic pilasters and broken scrolled pediments with center keyblocks. The panels underneath are treated like pedestals. The second-story entry (which opened onto the upper tier of the former portico) has a double-leaf natural-finish door with glass upper panels framed by turned pilasters under an arched lintel with a center patera. In front of the door is a false balcony formed from reused veranda balusters.

On the northwest elevation is a secondary entry with a single-leaf door similar in detail to the second-story front door. The entry is sheltered by a porch with a single round arch of light-

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**Description (continued)**

colored quarry-faced stone with bush-hammered undersides to the voussoir stones. Concrete steps with stone cheeks rise to the porch, which has a red and brown tile floor and simple modern balustrades. Capping the porch is a concave hip roof and a rectangular-plan bay window with reeded window surrounds and cornice brackets with faceted pendants. There are other entries on the rear elevations of the main house and rear wing.

The house has one-over-one windows with transom panes on the first story and one-over-one windows without transoms on the second story. There are also one-over-one windows in the northwest and southeast gables. The rear service wing has one-over-one and four-over-four windows, a pedimented gable, a filled-in door on the southeast side, and a small modern deck on the southwest gable end. The basement has two-over-two windows. The chimneys above roof level were rebuilt in 1982 using quarry-faced light gray limestone from the former 1905 Big Stone Gap School.

**House Interior**

The front (northeast) entry opens into one end of the L-shaped passage that organizes the interior of the house. The passage has a number of finishes and features that also appear in other spaces: plaster walls, a paneled ceiling with a cove cornice with a decorative fringe, ceiling pendants marking the corners of the stairwells, Colonial Revival light fixtures, a paneled wainscot (the paneled ceilings, pendants, and wainscots are only in the first, second, and third-story passages), heavy molded baseboards, floors formed of narrow strips of wood (sometimes decoratively arranged), five-panel doors, and door surrounds with paneled embrasures and carved corner blocks (the carvings in the corner blocks, which also adorn the window surrounds, vary from room to room). In the corner of the passage is a 1990s information counter constructed of red oak and designed to harmonize with the historic interior.

A finely crafted dogleg stair rises in the L-shaped passage. The heavy bottom newel is square in section and angled. It has a tapered and paneled midsection, square bosses with knot-like carved ornament above, and a large finial. A paneled closed stringer and a short section of balustrade with square-section vasiform balusters rises to a second newel post more slender and more plainly finished than the first but similar in form. Here a curved landing makes the corner into the northwest arm of the L where the longer second run ascends to the second floor. Other features of the stair include a paneled spandrel and rounded bottom steps.

The room in the north corner of the first floor, which the L-shaped passage wraps around, served

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**Description (continued)**

historically as a study, as indicated by built-in glass-fronted bookcases. The room features an Italian mantel, installed about 1930, of white and green marble and classical design. The mantel's pilasters have Ionic capitals and false fluting suggested by inlaid strips of green marble. The tablets at the ends of the frieze are adorned with elliptical panels, and the center tablet has a carved swag formed of bellflowers. The mantel also has a dentil cornice, a low overmantel, cast-iron trim around the fireplace opening, and a fireplace surround and hearth of beige brick-like glazed tiles. The room has panels under the windows, a detail that appears in other main rooms.

A pocket door leads from the L-shaped passage into a large south parlor now used for exhibit space. Centered on the long inside wall is an Italian mantel, installed about 1930, of mottled brown and white marble and classical design. The mantel's pilasters have false fluting suggested by inlaid strips of darker brown marble, and in the center frieze tablet is a bas-relief carving of a covered urn. The mantel also has a dentil cornice, a low overmantel, brass trim around the fireplace opening, a marble fireplace surround, and a hearth of brown brick-like glazed tiles. Other features of the room include a plaster cornice, wooden Venetian blinds in the windows, and 1990s exhibits. The fourth first-floor room, the west corner dining room, has a double-leaf doorway to the passage and a door to the rear wing and was formerly served by a dumbwaiter.

The second floor has many details in common with the first floor. It originally contained bedrooms but is now used for exhibit space. There are several original red oak mantels that exhibit Romanesque and classical design influences. The mantels have colonettes with ribbed shafts and foliated capitals, friezes with triglyph-like ornamentation and carved center tablets, cast-iron fireplace opening trim, and fireplace surrounds and hearths formed of beige brick-like glazed tiles. The floors of the second-floor south and east rooms have curving inlaid patterns that may relate to door openings and to a former bay window. The doorways from the passage into the south and east rooms have transoms that were painted ca. 1948 with the inscriptions "DAR" and "UDC" (one room and its exhibits was the responsibility of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the other the United Daughters of the Confederacy). The door opening at the northeast end of the passage (which formerly opened onto the second tier of the front porch) has round-arched red oak trim with carved blocks at the apex and springing points. A round-arched opening connects the passage and one room. In the ceiling of the northwest bay window are carved foursquare panels.

The top half-floor is similar to the first and second floors in character, although the upper sections of some walls slope with the roof and there is some pine flooring. This floor served

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**Description (continued)**

historically for storage and as a child's play area. The north room, which contains a steep enclosed stair to the attic and is now used as an office, was finished more crudely than the others on this floor. It originally had green-painted beaded matchboard finishes but now has modern wall paneling and a drop ceiling. Original rafters in the unfinished attic are charred from a 1920s fire; many have scabbed-on lumber from after the fire. The framing, which includes trusswork, is constructed with circular-sawn lumber fastened with early wire nails. The attic houses heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning equipment.

The rear wing originally contained a kitchen on the first floor and a laundry room on the second floor (a 1947 account noted the existence of two small rooms on the second floor) and it retains a dogleg stair. In 1981 the kitchen was remodeled as an apartment for the Chief Ranger. It is now used for office space. The basement is reached by a stair under the first-floor stair. At its base the stair has a closed stringer, square-section balusters with grooved sides, and a paneled square-section newel with a domed cap. The floor of the basement's L-shaped passage is paved with fragments of tile block with the ridges and dimples of the blocks still evident. In some doorways are more conventional terra-cotta tile pavers. The basement has beaded matchboard wainscots with molded chairrails, and 1990s overhead ductwork made less intrusive with red oak trim. The basement is used for exhibits, office space, meeting space, and bathrooms.

**Outbuildings and Landscape Features**

The principal outbuilding is the carriage house, built about the same time as the house as indicated by architectural evidence and early photographs. The two-story building of rectangular plan stands on the back alley near the west corner of the nominated area. It is constructed of brick laid in seven-course American bond and painted. The hip roof is covered with simulation slate shingles manufactured in South Africa and added to replace asbestos shingles in the mid-1990s. Projecting from the roof are gables decorated with round louvered vents with dentil-like trim, scalloped wood shingle sheathing, and fanfold wood panels. The windows have modern one-over-one sash, quarry-faced stone lintels, and patent-hammered stone sills. Across the northeast-facing front are four openings with modern barn-type plywood hinged doors hung on modern decorative strap hinges. On the alley side is a bricked-up opening of large size (probably once used to drive a hay wagon into the building) and bricked-up windows. On the southeast side is a one-story brick wing with segmental-arched one-over-one windows and an engaged porch with arched openings filled with lattice. The interior was remodeled with sheetrock walls and ceilings and simple wooden trim in 1994-95. From the late 1940s until 1981 the carriage house served as the residence of the Curator/Chief Ranger.

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**Description (continued)**

The property is enclosed on all four sides by an original decorative stone wall with random irregular stonework and a coping consisting of alternating projecting and recessed rounded stones with pronounced concrete mortar joints. The wall curves back at the front corners of the property and it has pedestrian and/or vehicular openings on the northeast, northwest, and southwest (alley) sides. The openings are defined by stone piers with iron pintels for former iron gates, and the northeast and northwest openings have modern wood gates.

Between the gable end of the rear wing and the alley is a modern service area enclosed by a board fence. Inside are sheds, an outdoor break area, concrete walkways, heating and cooling units, and a small flower garden. The two sheds (Maintenance Building 1 and 2, which is two separate but abutting units, and Maintenance Building 3) are used for equipment storage and were built within an approximately three-year period about 2000. They are frame with T1-11 siding, asphalt-shingled shed roofs, barn-type doors, and foundations of poured concrete or concealed behind stone-pattern metal skirting.

The grounds, landscaped in 1983, are shaded by mature deciduous and evergreen trees and are ornamented with planting beds (see Exhibit A). Circulation paths follow historic courses but surfaces such as poured concrete and gravel are mostly modern. A wide historic concrete walkway connects the front gate to the front stoop and includes a set of steps with historic stone cheeks and a modern steel handrail. Resting near the northwest stoop are three inscribed stones from Big Stone Gap's early-twentieth-century public school complex, demolished in the 1970s. One stone is inscribed "Public School." Another is inscribed "Rebuilt 1905, Chas. Johnson, R. L. Brown contrs." The third stone is inscribed "Education is Better than Wealth, B.S.G. Dist., May 30, 1901." A small herb garden adjoins the carriage house on its northwest end. A stone carbide house formerly stood near the south corner of the lot.

**Integrity Statement**

The Southwest Virginia Museum possesses good integrity from the period of significance and excellent integrity for the period 1948 and later. The house retains virtually all exterior and interior features that it possessed in 1948, the year it was opened as the Southwest Virginia Museum and its significant association with former owner C. Bascom Slemp strengthened. The house also retains its original basic form, stone construction, and features including the two-story porch and bay window on the northwest elevation. However, the house was considerably altered from its original appearance by the removal of a wraparound veranda and southeast elevation bay window and by modifications to the roof during the second quarter of the twentieth century

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**Description (continued)**

(probably in 1946-48). The interior retains its original plan, character of finishes, stairs, trim, and many mantels. Two mantels and other lesser features were added about 1930. The grounds retain principal features such as the two-story carriage house and encircling wall, although at least one smaller original or early resource (a carbide house) is missing, and modern storage sheds have been added (although the latter are screened from view). Also, the shaded and landscaped character of the grounds perpetuates the historic character of the property. The property stands in the midst of a historic residential neighborhood with limited modern infill construction. A modern library occupies the parcel across West First Street North in front of the museum, although it is at a lower elevation that mitigates it as an intrusion.

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**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Summary**

The Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is a property of considerable historic and architectural significance located in Big Stone Gap, Wise County, Virginia. The Queen Anne stone house was completed in 1895 for Rufus A. Ayers, a former Attorney General of Virginia and a leading developer of Southwest Virginia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The house is distinguished by decorative stonework on the exterior and oak stairs, paneled ceilings and wainscots, and other embellishments on the interior. A brick carriage house and encircling stone wall complete the picture. In 1929 the house was acquired by C. Bascom Slemph, a long-term Republican congressman from Virginia's Ninth District, Calvin Coolidge's private secretary, and one of the engineers of the Republican Party's electoral gains in the South during the early twentieth century. Slemph has been described as "the most influential Southern Republican" of his era. He did not live in the Ayers residence but used it in part to house historical and political artifacts that became the nucleus of the Southwest Virginia Museum collection. The Museum, created in 1948 according to Slemph's wishes, is the principal historic site associated with Slemph's nationally significant political career.

**Applicable Criteria**

The Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park meets Criterion B and is eligible in the politics/government area of significance at the national level for its association with C. Bascom Slemph, a figure of national political significance during the first half of the twentieth century. The nature of Slemph's association with the property requires explanation. Slemph was most prominent in national politics during the period 1920 to 1925. His influence is considered to have progressively declined and to have become less national in scope during the period 1925 to 1936. Slemph's association with the Southwest Virginia Museum property began in 1929, and today the property is the principal surviving resource associated with him. Slemph's principal dwelling in Big Stone Gap no longer stands; his addresses in Washington, D.C., should they survive, were secondary places of residence and were apparently more than one in number; and his grave in Lee County, Virginia, might be considered to have a significant association only if there is "no other appropriate site or building directly associated" with him (Criterion Consideration C, *National Register Bulletin 16A*, p. 37). Slemph's association with the Southwest Virginia Museum is two-fold: through his ownership of the property from 1929 until his death in 1943, and through the property's posthumous illustration of his life and career beginning with its dedication as a museum in 1948 featuring interpretive exhibits devoted to Slemph. Eligibility for post-career and posthumous associations are allowed for in at least two analogous circumstances in National Register guidelines: as noted above in Criterion Consideration C, and in *National Register*

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

*Bulletin 32*, p. 16 (properties eligible under Criterion B "might include a person's last home, even if most or all of his or her significant accomplishments occurred before [s]he lived in the house").<sup>1</sup>

The Southwest Virginia Museum is also eligible under Criterion B in the industry area of significance at the state level for its association with Southwest Virginia industrialist Rufus A. Ayers, who lived in the property from 1895 until the 1920s. Ayers also led a distinguished political career, but this occurred prior to his association with the Big Stone Gap house while his principal residence was in Gate City, Scott County (his Gate City house is extant). The property is also locally eligible under Criterion C in the architecture area of significance for the quality of its architectural detail. The period of significance extends from the date of completion of the house in 1895 through 1952, embracing the associations with Slemp and Ayers and the early years of operation of the Southwest Virginia Museum. Information in support of eligibility appears throughout the historic context.<sup>2</sup>

**Acknowledgments**

A number of individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Foremost among these was the Park Manager of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park, Janet H. Blevins, who conducted much of the preliminary research for the nomination. Others who provided assistance included Margaret Appleman, Reference Librarian with the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.; and June Ellis, Mike Pulice, and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Washington, D.C., city directories and telephone directories list several places of residence and work for Slemp during the mid-1920s. He does not appear to have maintained a residence in Washington during the early part of 1923. From late 1923 through early 1925 he lived at 714 Otis Place, NW, and in 1925 he appears to have operated a law office at 815 15th Street, NW. By 1926 he had moved his residence to the Shoreham (Margaret Appleman personal communication). According to Slemp biographer Guy B. Hathorn, Slemp maintained a residence in Washington through the end of 1935 and thereafter lived principally at his home in Big Stone Gap (Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slemp," 313). Slemp traveled extensively and he customarily wintered in Palm Beach, Florida.

<sup>2</sup> Hass, "Stately homes grace Gate City."

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Historic Context

The stone house that is the core resource of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was completed in 1895 for Rufus Adolphus Ayers (1849-1926). Ayers, a native of Bedford County, moved to Goodson (Bristol, Virginia) with his family as a boy. He enlisted in the Confederate Army in 1864 at the age of fourteen and served in Tennessee. After the war he worked in the retail trade, as he had briefly before enlisting, and in 1870 he married Victoria Louisa Morison (ca. 1849-1920) of Gate City, Scott County. The couple raised three children to maturity: Kate Lewis (b. 1871), Harry J. (b. 1873), and James Buchanan (b. 1878).<sup>3</sup>

Rufus Ayers studied law and opened a law office in Gate City in the early 1870s. He served as Commonwealth's Attorney from 1875 to 1881 and worked in Richmond as the Clerk of the Committee on Finance and Reading Clerk of the House of Delegates during the second half of the 1870s. The period also saw his first important contributions to the development of the Southwest Virginia region. In 1876 he obtained a charter to construct a railroad between Gate City and Big Stone Gap and he organized the construction company that began work on the line the following year. Also in 1876 he purchased the *Scott Banner*, which served to broadcast a pro-growth agenda. Ayers' initial forays into economic development came at the beginning of a period of explosive growth in Southwest Virginia as entrepreneurs vied to exploit the region's vast coal reserves and other resources. Ayers helped spearhead development by joining with other capitalists in forming the Virginia Coal & Iron Company in 1881. He served as the VC&IC's Director from 1893 to 1910 and, according to one account, as its Vice President.<sup>4</sup>

Like most prominent Virginians of his era, Ayers was a Democrat, and his legal, legislative, and business prominence served to move him into the upper echelons of the state Democratic Party. In 1883 he became a member of both the state party's central and executive committees and the following year he served as vice president of Virginia's delegation to the Democratic national

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<sup>3</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 19; Dunn, "Attorney General Goes to Jail," 29; and U.S. census. Victoria Ayers' year of birth is variously given as 1853 and ca. 1849 in censuses.

<sup>4</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 19-20; Dunn, "Attorney General Goes to Jail," 30; Jones, "Career of a Southwest Virginian;" Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 59; and Harman, "Rufus A. Ayers," 4.

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convention. These posts positioned him to run for state office, and in 1885 he was elected Attorney General on a ticket with gubernatorial candidate Fitzhugh Lee. Ayers immediately became embroiled in one of the most contentious issues of post-bellum Virginia politics, the complicated "debt case." Essentially, the Commonwealth was unable to pay off debts it had acquired during the more prosperous antebellum period. Politicians of the post-war generation struggled to balance the need to repay the \$45 million debt with the need to protect the treasury from a devastating drain on state resources. The Funders, who favored repayment according to the terms of the 1871 Funding Act, and the Readjustors, who strove to radically restructure the debt, were the issue's principal antagonists during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>5</sup>

According to Rufus Ayers' political biographer William R. Dunn, Ayers was a "strong Funder." Dunn attributes Ayers' stance to his business involvement. "Many Virginia businessmen," Dunn writes, "felt it was necessary to restore the state's fiscal honor in order to attract needed capital from the North and elsewhere. Ayers was particularly interested in attracting such financial support in order to develop southwest Virginia into an industrial and recreational center." In 1885, the year of Ayers' election, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Virginia must accept coupons from state bonds as payment for state taxes, but in 1886 and 1887 the state legislature made the use of coupons more difficult. To force a more lenient policy, a group of London speculators filed suit against the state in the U.S. Circuit Court for Eastern Virginia. Ayers was named as a defendant. Through a chain of maneuvers Ayers was found in contempt of federal court and fined. When Ayers and two commonwealth's attorneys in the same predicament refused to pay their fines, they were placed under surveillance. Ayers decided he preferred imprisonment to surveillance and on October 8, 1887 he checked in to the Richmond city jail.<sup>6</sup>

The Attorney General's self-imprisonment caused him little discomfort--he received catered meals and was free to make visits to the Governor--but it was a brilliant ploy that popularized the state's cause and forced the federal marshals to back down. Ayers was freed on bond and in the legal battles that followed the contempt charges were dropped and the federal courts vindicated the state's position. According to Dunn, "The decision removed the case from the federal courts and left Virginia free to handle its debt problem according to its own laws. This was a victory for state sovereignty." Ayers was showered with praise by the press and the legislature, and

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<sup>5</sup> Dunn, "Attorney General Goes to Jail," 31-33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 32-35.

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Governor Lee wrote him, "I take great pleasure in uniting with the Legislature in its commendation of the spirit that enabled you, while obeying the laws of your state, to look through the bars of a jail, in order that you might peaceably see the rights of Virginia under the constitution preserved."<sup>7</sup>

The remaining years of Ayers' term were relatively uneventful. In 1890, according to a 1939 piece by *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporter Pat Jones, "'General' Ayers, as he was then called, turned his back upon the Capitol of Virginia, despite strong encouragement to run for the governorship, and went back to further his work in the development of the Southwest." Ayers and his family moved from Gate City to Big Stone Gap in 1895, and Ayers did return briefly to the political fray in 1912 when he ran unsuccessfully for the Ninth District congressional seat against Republican power broker C. Bascom Slemp. (Slemp, a good friend of Ayers, purchased the latter's Big Stone Gap residence in 1929.)<sup>8</sup>

Rufus Ayers' shrewd actions as Attorney General no doubt enhanced his reputation in legal and business circles. He helped organize at least a dozen businesses in later years, including the Appalachia Steel & Iron Company, the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel & Iron Company, the Empire Coal Land Corporation, the Tazewell Coal & Land Corporation, the Stone Gap Colliery, the Interstate Finance Company, a tannery, a street railway company, brick plants, banks in Big Stone Gap and Gate City, and a telephone company that is counted among the first in Southwest Virginia. According to Janet Blevins, Ayers "was instrumental in helping develop the coal and iron industry in Southwest Virginia and bringing the railroads to this area." Big Stone Gap benefitted considerably from its resident tycoon. Ayers was president of the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company, a principal developer in the town during the early 1890s. With other early developers Ayers promoted Big Stone Gap as the "Pittsburgh of the South" because of its proximity to coal and iron deposits. Ayers purchased the *Big Stone Post* and published it as the *Big Stone Gap Post* beginning in 1892. One indication of Ayers' impact on the development of the town was his status as the owner of the second most valuable improvements in Big Stone Gap in 1892. Two initiatives of particular interest among Ayers' many business dealings were his plans to set aside a 7,000-acre preserve on High Knob near Big Stone Gap and to bore a railroad tunnel under Kentucky's tallest mountain, Big Black Mountain, to connect

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 36-38.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 38-39; Jones, "Career of a Southwest Virginian."

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Virginia and Kentucky. The park idea was analogous to the approach later adopted by the government in the creation of state and national parks, and it received backing from many local and interstate stockholders. However, the plans of the Mountain Park Association and Ayers' tunnel scheme were abandoned during the depression of the early 1890s.<sup>9</sup>

In 1900 the federal census recorded the Ayers household as consisting of Rufus, who gave his occupation as lawyer, Victoria, Harry (like his father a lawyer), and James (no occupation). The 1910 census also listed Rufus and Harry as lawyers and identified James as a telegrapher. Living in the household with the family were Rufus and Victoria's daughter-in-law Julia, their infant granddaughter Martha, and Lucy Duff, a black servant. Victoria died in 1920 and Rufus lived on in the Big Stone Gap house a short while before it was sold to E. M. Gilly. Ayers died at St. Albans Sanitarium in Radford in 1926. After his death it was said that "No one man ever transacted more business deals involving the transfer of vast boundaries of mineral lands and location of railroads" in Southwest Virginia. E. M. and Mollie Gilly, his wife, divided the house into three apartments, lived in one apartment, and rented the others. In February 1929 the Ayers House was sold to politician C. Bascom Slemph.<sup>10</sup>

Campbell Bascom Slemph (1870-1943) was born into a political family. His grandfather Sebastian Smyth Slemph and his father Campbell Slemph both served in the Virginia legislature. Bascom, who was reared at his father's log house in Turkey Cove, Lee County (which adjoins Wise County), graduated with honors from Virginia Military Institute in 1891 and taught mathematics intermittently at his alma mater through 1900. Slemph's association with Big Stone Gap began with a teaching position in 1893, and he settled permanently in the town in 1901 where he opened a law office. His own political career began in 1902 when he assisted his father in

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<sup>9</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 1, 20-21; Harman, "Rufus A. Ayers," 4, 7-8; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park," 8, 16; Jones, "Career of a Southwest Virginian;" Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 59; Wise County Historical Society, *Heritage of Wise County*, 398; Johnson, *Wise County Virginia*, 229, 341, 343; and Wise County land books (tax records).

<sup>10</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 8, 13-14; Harman, "Rufus A. Ayers," 9; Wise County Deed Book 183, p. 352; and U.S. census. The remark on Ayers' real estate and railroad transactions is paraphrased by Harman from Ayers' obituary in a May 1926 issue of the *Big Stone Gap Post*.

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winning Virginia's Ninth District congressional seat as a Republican. The party took note of Bascom's contribution to his father's campaign. According to a period newspaper account, "It was seen at once that the Republican party of Virginia had within its ranks a young Napoleon, who was a master organizer, a tireless campaigner, and a leader to whom the party could intrust [*sic*] a still more important campaign." Meanwhile Slep engaged in highly successful business ventures. As early as 1892 he speculated in land in the Kentucky coal fields, and in 1902 he formed the Kentucky Coal Land Company. Out of this concern Slep formed the Kentucky River Coal Corporation, which eventually controlled 155,000 acres and paid out dividends in excess of \$3 million over Slep's lifetime. The KRCC was the dominant landholding company in the Hazard Coalfield of the Kentucky counties of Perry and Letcher.<sup>11</sup>

Campbell Slep, the father, was twice reelected to Congress, and he used his political prestige to help appoint his son Chairman of the Republican State Committee, a position that Bascom held from 1905 to 1918. The elder Slep died in 1907 and Bascom won a special election to succeed him. Bascom Slep was reelected to the seat an additional seven terms, serving until 1923, and this coupled with his control of Virginia's Republican party machinery made him "the dominant factor in Virginia's Republican politics" for a quarter of a century, according to Virginia historian Virginius Dabney. As the state's lone Republican congressman for most of the period, Slep acted as patronage dispenser for a succession of Republican presidential administrations, and his control of patronage further enhanced his influence in party and state politics. During this period, in 1911, Slep married Miss Roberta Barton of Louisiana. The marriage ended in divorce in 1914.<sup>12</sup>

C. Bascom Slep became more active in national politics in the late 1910s. As a congressman he had devoted himself primarily to the needs of his Southwest Virginia constituents. His political biographer Guy B. Hathorn has written, "Mr. Slep was not an outstanding congressman in terms of creative legislative measures," although he did participate in progressive initiatives such as improving working conditions for the nation's laborers. Slep's broader influence, the basis of his national significance, was more purely political in nature. In 1919 he

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<sup>11</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slep," 16-19, 23-25, 29-30; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 145-146.

<sup>12</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slep," 32, 38-39, 142, 165, 196; Dabney, *New Dominion*, 499; and Atkinson, *Dynamic Dominion*, 12.

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was tapped to manage the successful candidacy of Massachusetts Representative Frederick Gillett for Speaker of the House, and the following year he was instrumental in securing Southern support for the nomination of Warren Harding as the Republican candidate for President. To coordinate the Harding campaign in the South, the Republican Party opened its first Southern headquarters in Washington, D.C. with Slep as its director. He also served for many years as Virginia's representative to the Republican National Committee.<sup>13</sup>

During the Harding Administration Slep performed on a national level the role he had earlier perfected in Virginia, that of dispenser of patronage. He headed a committee created by Harding to deal with patronage issues in the South, and according to Hathorn "hundreds of individuals seeking Federal jobs passed through Congressman Slep's office each day." Slep's national party responsibilities prompted his decision not to run for reelection from the Ninth District in 1922. From a career standpoint his timing proved advantageous. In August 1923 Harding died in office and Vice President Calvin Coolidge was sworn in as his replacement. Coolidge's first presidential appointment was the naming of C. Bascom Slep as his secretary and chief aide. In making his choice Coolidge relied on the advice of Frederick Gillett, whom Slep had helped in his bid to become Speaker of the House. Slep was chosen for his familiarity with Congress and for his political acumen, but not everyone approved of the selection. Slep's heavy-handed approach to patronage was remarked on by Democrats, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People criticized him for his efforts to exclude blacks from participation in the Republican Party in Virginia and the South.<sup>14</sup>

The *New York Times* described Slep as Coolidge's "right-hand man" and defined his role as "handling much of the party politics" for the President and serving as his liaison with Congress. Slep's immediate task was positioning the President to run in the 1924 election; in fact, Slep's very appointment was interpreted as the first indication that Coolidge would seek his party's nomination. As in 1920 Slep worked to secure Southern delegates for his candidate at the nominating convention and during the campaign he served as the GOP's Southern campaign manager. Slep helped assure Coolidge's election, but the effort proved to be a high-water mark

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<sup>13</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slep," 127-132, 157, 339; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park," 44; and *New York Times*, August 8, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slep," 173-175, 192-196; Dabney, *New Dominion*, 499.

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in his own career. Other presidential advisors outmaneuvered Slemp on key issues and in the summer of 1924 Slemp offered his resignation to the President. Coolidge did not accept, in large part to preserve an appearance of party unity. The *New York Times* commented on press reports of the abortive resignation: "Those who have followed the course of Mr. Slemp, his great political activity at the beginning of this Administration, when the President leaned upon him heavily, his slight eclipse after the Southern delegates had been obtained, and the differences of opinion that arose between himself and Mr. Butler and Frank W. Stearns [powerful Republican political managers] accepted the story at once as being directed against Mr. Slemp." According to Coolidge biographer Donald McCoy, Slemp lost considerable influence in the campaign and the Administration as a result of the affair. He tendered his resignation again in January 1925 and it was accepted.<sup>15</sup>

Slemp remained a potent force in national Republican politics and he maintained good relations with Coolidge, even authoring a book on his reticent friend's political philosophy entitled *The Mind of the President* (1926). In the election of 1928 he teamed with Virginia Methodist Bishop James Cannon Jr. to engineer Herbert Hoover's electoral victory in Virginia and to assist his wins in other Southern states. In general, Slemp was an important factor in Republican gains throughout the South in the 1920s, an early phase in the development of the two-party system in the region during the latter part of the twentieth century. It is thought that Slemp hoped to be rewarded for his efforts with a cabinet post, but Hoover, like Harding and Coolidge before him, did not extend the favor. Embarrassingly publicized irregularities in Slemp's handling of patronage are generally believed to have been the reason. The success of Slemp and the Republican Party in Virginia in 1928 actually served to weaken Slemp's influence, since the election of three Republican congressmen diluted his formerly exclusive access to patronage power. Slemp's political disappointments reached a head with the Roosevelt landslide of 1932, and the "Sage of Turkey Cove," as he was known in the press, largely retired from politics.<sup>16</sup>

Bascom Slemp turned his attention to his vast business enterprises, which had made him a millionaire, and to philanthropies such as support of the University of Virginia Institute of Public Affairs, established with his assistance in the late 1920s. He also indulged his love of travel,

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<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, June 17, 1924, and August 8, 1943; McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge*, 238, 252; Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slemp," 223.

<sup>16</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slemp," 267-268; Dabney, *New Dominion*, 500.

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collecting, and Southwest Virginia history, interests he shared with his sister Susan Jane ("Janie") Slemp Newman (1869-1935). Janie Slemp married John Wesley Newman, a Kentucky State Senator, in 1916, and although she made her principal residence in Versailles, Kentucky, she maintained ties with Big Stone Gap and Wise County. She was a charter member and librarian of the local Boone Trail Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and an avid collector of Southwest Virginia historical documents and artifacts. Her brother purchased the Ayers House in 1929 in part to house his sister's and his own growing collections, another portion of which was contained in an outbuilding behind Slemp's residence at Second Street and Shawnee Avenue.<sup>17</sup>

The Ayers House also served as a residence for Slemp relatives. The first occupant was a cousin, P. W. Slemp, and his wife Dorothy, who was the daughter of a U.S. Secretary of the Interior. In the mid-1930s a nephew, Campbell Edmonds, his wife Mary, and their children Nancey and Cammy moved into the house, where they lived until 1946. Janie Slemp died in 1935, and Bascom carried on their joint program of collecting Southwest Virginia historical items. During this period the collection was referred to variously as the Janie Slemp Newman Memorial Museum (in 1937) and the Slemp Historical Collection. In 1942 Bascom offered to donate the collection to the Commonwealth of Virginia if the state would appropriate funds for the construction of a museum. The Legislature complied, and Slemp wrote to the Governor to express his gratification that a "museum out here" had been approved. However, before work began on a new museum building Slemp suffered a heart attack and died on August 7, 1943. The Slemp Foundation, created by his will, arranged to sell the Ayers House to the state for use as the museum, a purchase completed in 1946. The house was remodeled and opened to the public as the Southwest Virginia Museum on May 30, 1948 with the Governor and other notables in attendance. A newspaper editor commented before the opening: "The idea to preserve the past and present history for future generations is a movement long needed in this section . . . There has been no movement to preserve the pioneer history of this section until Mr. Slemp started his collection for the Museum."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dabney, *New Dominion*, 500; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park"; and Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 3, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Hathorn, "Political Career of C. Bascom Slemp," 313, 329-330; Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 5-7; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park," 56-57; and "Southwest Virginia Museum can mean much to section."

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James E. True, formerly with the state's Works Progress Administration Art Project, was selected as the curator. True had earlier served as an artist in residence for Slemp, building dioramas and painting portraits for the collection. A January 1949 article in the *Scott County News* described the Museum and its collections in detail. Of particular relevance are references to the exhibits devoted to Slemp and his career. These included convention badges displayed in the bookcases in the first-floor office, and a free-standing exhibit containing newspaper clippings, photographs of Slemp and the Coolidges, letters from national figures, and Slemp's 1925 letter of resignation. The *Scott County News* columnist noted that when Slemp offered his collection to the state, "the leaders of the Democratic party jokingly requested that he leave out his political trophies won from them in the many hot battles in which he came out victorious." The Slemp exhibits were expanded as part of a 1\$ million renovation in the early 1990s. Also on display are non-Virginia items collected by Bascom and Janie including a set of Minton china that was commissioned by Queen Victoria for her Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, and nineteenth-century paintings by French artists of the Barbizon School and others. The Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park continues to serve its original function as a branch of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.<sup>19</sup>

**Architectural Analysis**

As completed in 1895, the Ayers House was an inspired example of the Queen Anne Style, and many original features survive. Missing, however, is the principal original exterior feature, an impressive wraparound veranda that featured stone pillars, a circular corner element, a basement level, and a roof-top balcony. The veranda included a projecting two-tier section on the front (northeast) elevation with spindle brackets forming arched openings. The two-tier section was engaged under a steeply pitched gabled projection of the slate hip-and-gable roof, which was embellished with dormers and a widow's walk-like cresting. Owing to its unsafe condition the veranda was removed when the house underwent its museum conversion in the late 1940s, although, as noted in section 7, some elements of the porch survive. The interior retains features typical of the finest domestic construction of the era such as the paneled ceilings, staircases, and intricately carved window and door surround accents of red oak (quality woods with natural

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<sup>19</sup> Janet Blevins personal communication; Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 3, 6; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park," 43-57; and "Southwest Va. Museum."

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finishes were prized).<sup>20</sup>

Research and interviews conducted by Park Manager Janet H. Blevins have identified many of the individuals who were responsible for the construction and finishes of the house. According to tradition, Rufus Ayers initially arranged for a Bristol, Virginia company to build the house, but when he became dissatisfied with their work he hired Big Stone Gap contractor Charles Ralph Johnson Sr. (b. ca. 1863) to complete the project. Johnson, who was born Charles Gustus Johansson in Stockholm, Sweden, emigrated to the United States in 1883 and located in Big Stone Gap in 1891. Johnson established a stone cutting and building business, and it may be assumed that he was principally responsible for the many inspired albeit somewhat naive stonework details of the house. Johnson subcontracted the carpentry work, and two of the principal carpenters were James Cox, who carved the main newel post and other decorative details, and Van Buren ("Dave") Dickenson, who laid the floor. Others who worked on the house were Charlie Moorefield, who assisted with the stonework, and Fitzhugh Olinger and Alexander Seaton (contributions unknown). Also, vocational students from a Wise, Virginia technical school operated by a Swede named Joe Riderky are thought to have worked on the house. The McCorkle Lumber Company, active in Big Stone Gap during the period of the house's construction, was likely the source of the red oak used in the finishes.<sup>21</sup>

Wise County tax records provide the most reliable evidence for the date of construction of the house. The 1892 records list Ayers as having received from the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company the first two of an eventual eight lots forming the northeast half of Block 52. The 1893 records note that he had acquired most if not all of the remaining lots from various owners. The 1894 records are the first to note the existence of a building on the lots, valued at \$18,000, with a marginal note "Value increased by Buildings." In 1895 the value of buildings dropped to \$15,000 and by 1900 it had decreased further to \$9,000. This devaluation probably reflects a cooling of the local economy associated with the national economic downturn of the 1890s.

The 1894 tax records date accords well with the only known newspaper reference to the house while under construction. The June 21, 1894 *Big Stone Gap Post* reported that Ayers visited Big Stone Gap to check on the progress of construction. He remarked that the house should be

<sup>20</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

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completed by September 1895 and he valued the property at \$25,000. Plans for the construction of the encompassing stone wall appear to have been in preparation by March 1894 when a lenticular parcel was added to the front of Ayers' lots. The parcel was taken from West First Street and roughly corresponds in form to the wall with its gracefully curved and setback corners at Wood and Shawnee avenues. The deeds representing the alteration indicate that the area directly in front of the house now occupied by Big Stone Gap's public library was set aside as a park in 1894.<sup>22</sup>

The Boston, Massachusetts architectural firm of Winslow & Wetherell has been suggested as the designer of the house. Walter Thatcher Winslow (1843-1909) and George H. Wetherell (1854-1930) designed a hotel for Big Stone Gap in 1890 that was to be built across the street from the house site. The 300-room Queen Anne-Chateausque building was to be constructed of concrete, but it was never built. The hotel design shared a number of general characteristics with the Ayers House but had no close architectural affinities. Another project of Winslow & Wetherell in Virginia was the design of an addition to the house of Jedediah Hotchkiss in Staunton. The curious 1888-90 brick addition melded aspects of the Colonial Revival and Romanesque styles and included a variety of window forms and a third-story loggia. It is more sophisticated architecturally than the later Ayers House, suggesting the Ayers House may not be a Winslow & Wetherell design.<sup>23</sup>

The next milestone in the architectural evolution of the house came in 1946 when Edmund Schureman Campbell (1884-1950), head of the University of Virginia program in architectural studies, was selected to remodel the house as a museum. Campbell was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He served on the Advisory Committee of Architects for Colonial Williamsburg and he designed or remodeled high-profile Charlottesville-area buildings including the Farmington Country Club (in 1929) and the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5; Wise County Deed Book 35, p. 262; and Big Stone Gap Minute Book I, pp. 213-215.

<sup>23</sup> Janet H. Blevins personal communication; Wells and Dalton, *Virginia Architects, 1835-1955*, 486; Wise County Historical Society, *Heritage of Wise County*, 398; Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 5; "Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park," 18; Brown and McCue, *Staunton, Virginia*, 56; and Withey and Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, 646-647. Wells and Dalton date the Ayers House to ca. 1893.

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Bayly Art Museum (in 1934-35). Campbell's remodeling stripped the dominant Queen Anne features from the exterior of the house, leaving a basically symmetrical core with a vaguely Colonial Revival appearance.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Blevins, "Southwest Virginia Museum History," 6; Lay, *Architecture of Jefferson Country*, 142, 282, 286.

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National Park Service

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Wise Co., Va.

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National Park Service**

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated parcel consists of the northeast half of Town of Big Stone Gap block no. 52 (lots 1 through 8) as depicted on Wise County Map Insert 76A Part 7.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the nominated parcel encompass the historic and present property on which the Southwest Virginia Museum and its carriage house stand.

ATES  
Y AUTHORITY

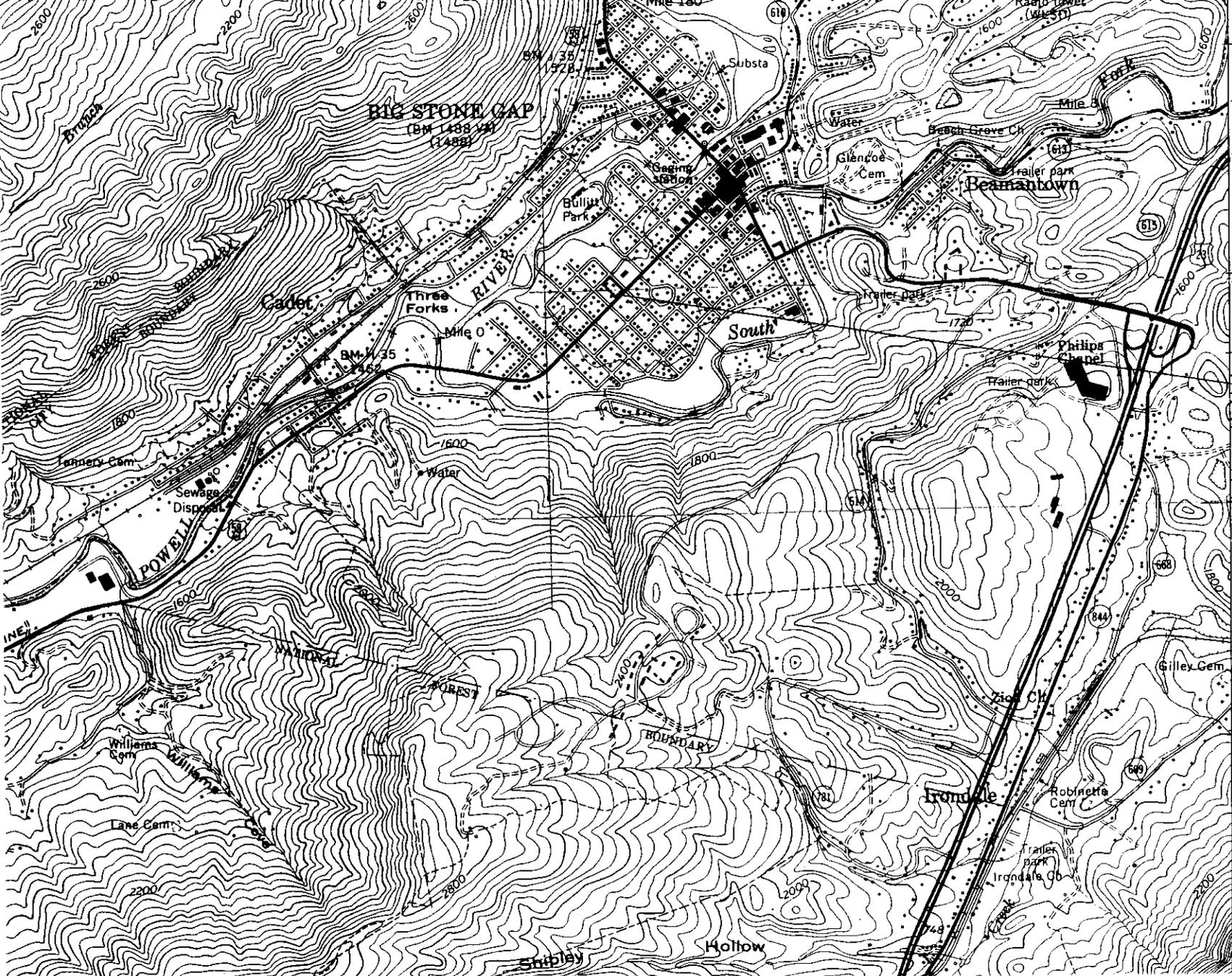
# BIG STONE GAP QUADRANGLE VIRGINIA

7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC) 178-SE

44571 NW  
(NORTON 187-NW)

NORTON 14 MI  
APPALACHIA 2.5 MI  
750 000 FEET

78-NE) P39 P40 47'30" P41 P43 82°45'



EAST STONE GAP 0.4 MI.

220 000  
FEET

Southwest Virginia Museum  
(Historical State Park  
Wise Co., Va.  
UTM ref. (zone 17)  
E341300 N4081000

4080

4079

4078