



Future Museum Site Moves Toward Historic Designation

Recently, the **Mount Zion AME Church**, future home of the Stoutsbury Sourland African American Museum, cleared the first hurdle on the road toward listing on the **New Jersey State Register of Historic Places**, and ultimately the **National Register of Historic Places**. The historic registers are official lists of historic properties worthy of preservation. Listing in both the New Jersey and National Historic Registers provides not only recognition, but also affords funding opportunities. Additionally, the New Jersey and National Registers provide a degree of review and protection from public encroachment as well.

The **New Jersey State Review Board for Historic Sites** will consider the church's nomination at its March 2018 meeting in the Department of Environmental Protection Public Hearing Room in Trenton. If the State Review Board approves, the next step is review by the **National Park Service** later in the year.

The SSAAM Board would like to express its appreciation to Patrick Harshbarger of Hunter Research, Inc., for researching and writing the nomination. The nomination process was generously funded by a Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant.

It's with great excitement and anticipation that SSAAM's trustees will attend the meeting in March to support the nomination. We'll keep you posted on the Mount Zion AME Church's progress!

Here's little history of the building that was included in the nomination process:

The Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1866 in Zion, New Jersey, on property where Somerset, Hunterdon, and Mercer Counties meet. At the time, there were a number of black families living in the area, some of whom worked in the peach orchards while others ran a small, but successful basket factory. Granite quarries for making city Belgian block streets were also nearby. After the latter two industries had become obsolete by mechanization and blight, the church was dismantled and rebuilt at its current location at 189 Hollow Road in Skillman to take advantage of proximity to the railroad. Mt. Zion AME actively presented successful camp meetings for many years. The church closed in 2005. The simple, one-room building is a wood frame construction on a stone foundation clad in vertical beaded board that is painted white. It has a pitched roof and each gabled end has an entry door and a decorative picket detail at the eave line. The entry façade has a gabled porch roof supported by two turned wood columns. The interior is remarkably intact with stained and varnished vertical beaded board walls. The pulpit is at the east wall on a raised platform. Original wood pews have a unique design with hinged backs. The building has a high degree of integrity and character defining features.

We'll update the nomination process as it moves toward inclusion on the National Register.