



GIVING VOICE

SSAAM's Newsletter & Annual Report

A Community engaged in a broader understanding of American History

MAY 2021

ISSUE #1

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA TRUE PAYNE April 20, 2021

By Elaine Buck and Beverly Mills



Patricia True Payne

Patricia True Payne (Pat) relocated back home to New Jersey after several years of living and working in Massachusetts. Patricia is a descendant of Friday Truehart who was among the first African American settlers to reside in the Sourland Mountain Region, after gaining his freedom in 1819.

Friday and Juda, his wife, raised three sons, Isaac, Aaron, and Moses. Pat descends from Moses and his wife, Liza, who also made their home on Sourland

Mountain. Spencer True (Pat's great-grandfather and one of the family members who shortened their last name to True) and his second wife, Corinda, were instrumental in donating the land where the historic register-listed Mt. Zion AME Church presently stands. The church shut its doors in 2005 and now houses exhibits for the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum (SSAAM), and is being lovingly restored by SSAAM. Because of her strong family ties to the region and to the mission of SSAAM, we thought it only fitting for Pat to be the subject of SSAAM's first Newsletter & Annual Report. Pat generously donated \$100,000 to SSAAM upon returning back to the area.

Describe what the farm was like when you visited your grandparents as a child.

My grandmother was Mae Matilda and my grandfather was Scudder True. I didn't realize we were country folks. We didn't have central heating or running water. We had a pump in the front yard and there was a big pear tree. In the kitchen we had a pump and after a heavy rain, big old worms! There was a big coal stove in the living room that heated the living room and upstairs. The coal stove in the kitchen heated the kitchen. It



Photo Credit: Brad Fay

Beverly Mills and Elaine Buck SSAAM Founders and Advisory Board Members

was a big deal when we got a propane tank, which we used with a modern stove, but my grandmother preferred to cook in that cast iron stove. My brothers would shovel the coal from the coal pile and bring it upstairs! But having those stoves in the kitchen and living room - that was just normal! I remember the three of us kids - my two brothers, Jerry and Bill and I - with no bathroom, no running water. But we learned!

The other part about Skillman was having that wonderful five acres of property and those huge gardens. The only photo I have of my grandfather shows him as being very straight

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we navigate through this “new normal” of working and meeting remotely, and all the difficulties of COVID 19, we move forward with our restoration work on the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum (SSAAM) building.

We look forward to working with Mills & Schnoering Architects to develop plans, along with the Sourland Conservancy, for our future Education and Exhibit Center on the property situated next door to SSAAM.



John B. Buck
SSAAM Board President

In 2020, SSAAM developed a strategic plan, under the guidance of consulting services provided by Pat Bohse of Bohse & Associates, LLC. This plan is the guiding force behind our committee work, programs and projects.

I am personally thankful for the tireless work of our staff and our SSAAM Board members, and I am sincerely grateful for our partnership with the Sourland Conservancy, our many faithful volunteers, and all of our loyal donors who help to make all of our goals and plans come to fruition. Stay tuned for updates and ways you can be a part of our future plans and visions by signing up for our eNewsletter at www.ssaamuseum.org, and feel free to contact us at info@ssaamuseum.org.

Sincerely,
John B. Buck

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings! On behalf of the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum, I am delighted to welcome you to our first Newsletter and Annual Report. The story of SSAAM's growth into a sustainable, fiscally sound, impactful organization is an exciting one – and it is one that would not exist without the donors, volunteers, businesses, foundations, organizations, grantors, and government entities who make it possible for us to achieve our mission to tell the story of the unique culture, experiences, and contributions of the African American community of the Sourland Mountain Region.



Caroline Katmann
Executive Director

The purpose of this publication is twofold. In these pages, you will find information about our organization and its programs and progress. We also wish to acknowledge, with deep gratitude, all of those who have made it possible for us to come this far and to dream big about our future.

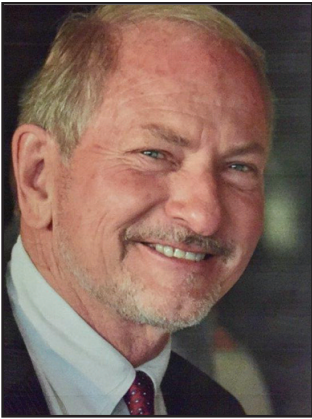
In these challenging times, we have an opportunity to work together toward justice, equity, and freedom for all. We hope you will continue your involvement with SSAAM as a volunteer, donor, or as an ambassador helping to spread the word about our mission. Up-to-date news about all of SSAAM's work can be found at www.ssaamuseum.org, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

We also invite you to stay informed about our partner organization, the Sourland Conservancy, www.sourland.org, with whom we share a vision of environmental and social justice. Our plans to create a Sourland Education & Exhibit Center can be found at <https://www.ssaamuseum.org/sourland-center>.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the first issue of our newsletter, *Giving Voice!*
With gratitude,
Caroline Katmann

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS REPORT

By Bruce Daniels, SSAAM Vice President, Buildings & Grounds Committee Chairman



Bruce Daniels
Board Vice President
Buildings & Grounds Chairman

The Mt. Zion AME church was built on Hollow Road in Skillman in 1899, as its congregants relocated from their homes and their original house of worship at the top of Sourland Mountain.

A peach blight had destroyed the extensive orchards on which their local economy depended.

Parishioners Corinda and Spencer True donated the land on which the new church was built, and it went on to serve the African American community for over one hundred years. The last church service at Mt. Zion AME was held in 2005.

By 2011, the unused building had fallen into disrepair, and the Sourland Planning Council (now the Sourland Conservatory) conducted a special fundraising drive in order to repair and paint the exterior of the church. The Montgomery Township Landmarks Commission provided a grant to pay for the materials needed for the project. This work stabilized the building until 2016 when

the idea of the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum (SSAAM) started to become a reality.

In 2016 SSAAM received a Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant of \$67,688. for mission and vision planning, an architectural analysis of the building (done by Historic Building Architects of Trenton), and for the preparation of applications for the State and National Registers of Historic Places (Hunter Research, Inc. of Trenton).

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2020 Virtual Gospel Music Concert

By Catherine Fulmer Hogan, SSAAM Board Member

The Annual Gospel Bunch is one of the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum's signature events. It is a time when we gather together as a community and celebrate African American culture through food and worship-music. It is a time when we break bread, share stories, inspire, and conspire. The pandemic has been fraught with all sorts of challenges. Deciding to move ahead with a virtual format for an event that has always been about sharing space and energy, was not an easy choice to make. As a Board, we are of the collective opinion that it was the right choice.

Offering an escape and even a touch of what we create with the Gospel Brunch every year was a gift to us all. Families watched it together, often multiple times throughout the day. Although we could not share the room, the music still brought us together just as it always

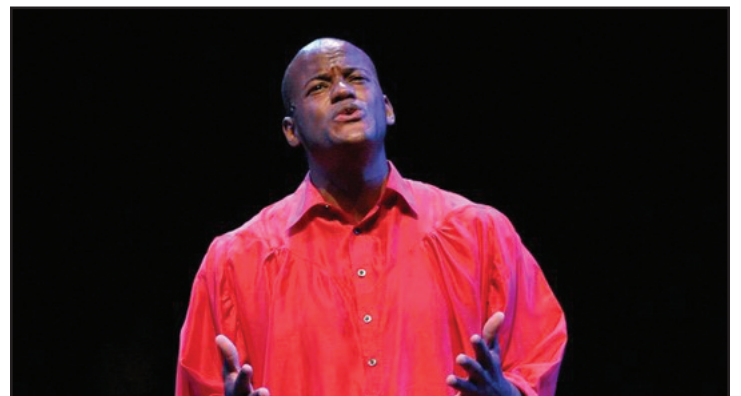
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Catherine Fulmer-Hogan
Board Member



Board member and archaeologist, Ian Burrow, hard at work during the replacement of the main beam and restoration of the floor at Mt. Zion AME Church.



Keith Spencer, *Baritone.*

History Going Underground at SSAAM!

By Ian Burrow, Ph.D., SSAAM Board Member, Registered Professional Archaeologist

On Saturday December 12, 2020, seven professional archaeologists and 32 volunteers made history at the Mount Zion AME Church. This was the very first archaeological investigation at the site, and was a joint project of SSAAM and the Archaeological Society of New Jersey.

Archaeology is one of the tools we can use in our search for the stories, history and culture of African Americans in the Sourland Region. The last few decades have seen the development of a distinct sub-discipline of the archaeology of African Americans and of the great African enslavement “diaspora” of the 16th through the 19th centuries. The lives of people of African descent, both enslaved and free, are often “invisible” in the historical (that is the written) record. Using archaeology to study the places where they lived, the things they used, and the things they valued, we can learn more about them in a different way. SSAAM is now part of that wider research.

One of the questions that people often ask about archaeology is, “How do you know where to dig?” It’s a great conversation starter. Here at SSAAM, we are developing plans for the next phase of the restoration of the 1899 building. These plans include the construction of a wheelchair-friendly ramp at the back of the church, and a small extension to accommodate new heating and cooling systems.



Volunteers sift through the soil at the Dig.



Teamwork makes the work more fun!

ging circular holes about one-foot in diameter down to about 2.5 feet into the soil. This is done very carefully, placing all the excavated material in mesh screens in order to recover any artifacts. Two of our volunteers used small metal detectors to scan the dirt piles to see if anything had been missed, and this technique recovered several additional small metal items. Artifacts from each of the different layers or strata of soil are kept separate, because knowing where they came from, their “context”, is a crucial part of the analytical process. The depth of 2.5 feet is determined by two things: one is the fact that, generally speaking, if we are going to find artifacts they will be from the top two feet or so. The second, practical, reason is that it gets very difficult to dig a hole more than 2.5 deep with just a shovel!

We completed 12 of these tests in the area of the new ramp and extension: enough to give us a good idea of what lies beneath the grass here. We found that there were generally four or five distinct soil horizons in all the tests. These are all basically natural strata and from top to bottom, and are termed A1, A2, B1, B2 and C. They get progressively yellower and more clayey the deeper you dig. Most of the artifacts came from the top two strata.

So what did we find? We recovered about 250 artifacts dating from the late 1800’s and 1900’s. These have not yet been cleaned and identified, but include such things as window glass, nails and bricks, plain white ceramics, coal and even an iron padlock. What we did not find was any indication of activity on the site before the construction of the church in 1899, or any American-Indian artifacts. Both of these things were a possibility, so we were on the lookout for evidence of that kind.

What happens now? The artifacts will be cleaned up, identified and cataloged, and will become part of the SSAAM collection. When construction starts we will be on hand to recover any other artifacts which may be encountered. The technical details of the work will be presented in a written illustrated report, copies of which will be sent to local historical organizations, libraries, municipalities, and to New Jersey Historic Preservation agencies.

Many thanks to all our volunteers, and to the professional archaeologists who donated their time and skills to help us learn more about our past!



Dr. Ian Burrow inspects an artifact at the Mt. Zion AME archeology dig.

Of course, things like these need foundations, and foundations require digging into the ground. So, SSAAM teamed up with the Archaeological Society of New Jersey to do pre-emptive archaeology to recover what might lie beneath the ground before construction starts next year.

We used the method called “shovel-testing.” This involves dig-

Buildings & Grounds Report

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From 2016 to the present, we have been working with Wells Tree & Landscape of Princeton to remove dead trees and invasive species from the property. This work included the removal of a large Oak whose branches were lying on the roof of Mt. Zion and whose roots were damaging the foundation of the building. Several days of work have been contributed *pro bono* by Wells.

In 2018, SSAAM received a Matching Grant for Historic Preservation in the amount of \$15,000 from the NJ Historic Trust/1772 Foundation for the replacement of the termite-damaged center beam of the building, as well as for some foundation and siding restoration work. This project was carried out under the supervision of architect Maximilian Hayden of Hopewell during 2019.

Also in 2019, Alex Semple of In Situ Restoration in Hopewell, removed and restored the original pews of the church. Part of this restoration project was done *pro bono* by Alex and the remainder was paid for through SSAAM's "Take a Seat" program.

In 2019 SSAAM received another Historic Preservation Grant from Somerset County. This grant of \$326,461. was for the complete restoration of Mt Zion, covering everything from a new roof to heating & air conditioning, windows, doors, lighting, and accessibility. M+Sa (Mills & Schnoering Architects, LLC, of Princeton) was hired by SSAAM to create plans for this restoration project, and to bid and supervise the work. Their plans have been approved by the Montgomery Township Landmarks Commission and by the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office. We are now going out to bid to several local historic building contractors. The target for completion of this restoration project is late autumn of this year.

In 2020, SSAAM received a \$50,000.00 Preserve New Jersey Historic Preservation Grant from the NJ Historic Trust. This grant will help fund a Master Plan for the development, in collaboration with SSAAM's partner, the Sourland Conservancy, of the Mt. Zion Church and adjacent Sourland Center properties.

This is an exciting project that will provide educational and exhibition space, as we tell the story of the African American community on Sourland Mountain, and work towards the promotion of social and environmental equity and justice. M+Sa will be working on this plan during 2021. The project will include offices for both SSAAM and the Sourland Conservancy, exhibition and education space, and a nature center. Starting later this year, we will begin a capital campaign in support of the development of this property.

2020 Virtual Gospel Music Concert

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has. Baritone, Keith Spencer was brilliant. Not only did he share through the gift of song, but he also used it as a platform to educate the community about Negro Spirituals and their historical significance. This, coupled with the history lessons provided by SSAAM Trustee, Jonathon Lloyd, about Gospel Music's connection to today's Contemporary Music, and SSAAM Trustee, Catherine Fulmer-Hogan, about gospel music's connection to social justice and the Civil Rights Movement, was what the community has come to expect of SSAAM.

We hope that you enjoyed the program as much as we did, and we look forward to the day when we can gather with you again.

~ UPDATE on Property Purchases: ~

• **191 Hollow Road (Lot 3 / 1.25 acres) -** was put into preservation by Georgia Whidden and was purchased by SSAAM and Sourland Conservancy in common on July 29, 2019. This is the property that is the primary subject of the previously mentioned master plan. Unfortunately, the farmhouse on the property was not salvageable except for its foundation. Dendrochronology showed that the beams for the original structure had been cut in the winter of 1829/1830.

We hope to be able to reuse the foundation, either to build upon or as a sunken garden.

• **189 Hollow Road -** MT Zion and the Triangle (Lot 4.01 - 0.21 acres and Lot 3.01 - 0.31 acres) were purchased from the AME in September of 2020. These lots will both be incorporated into the master plan.

• **211 Hollow Road (Lot 2 - 0.23 acres) -** We remain in contact with the owner of this small property to our north, which has ties to the historic African American community on Sourland Mountain.

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA TRUE PAYNE

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backed, just a tall formal person –the quintessential “butler.” Before they came down to Hollow Road, they worked at Moore’s Farm where the peach orchards were - or perhaps it was the Wyckoff Farm? I’m not sure, but it was wherever the peaches were.

Do you remember the other Black families who worshipped at Mt. Zion? Did they come from other towns or were they primarily from the Black community living on the mountain?

From my memory, there were the Harrisons next door—some of the Harrisons went to Hopewell Baptist and others went to Mt. Zion; the Grover family up on Hollow Road; the Robinsons on Camp Meeting Avenue; the Jones family on Camp Meeting Avenue. We can’t forget the Hughes family – definitely Miss Pearl Hughes!

In the 1950s, the whole of Camp Meeting Avenue, from the intersection of Hollow Road to the Railroad tracks - where the post office used to be - were all Black families, all the way down to the little bridge. Now, all the Black families are gone except for a couple of houses.

Do you remember a man that lived across the street on the hill, a White man who donated a piece of property that we called the point? I believe he was German?

My grandmother worked for a local German family - a doctor - they used to take her to New Hampshire in the summer. She had all these German recipes and at Christmas she would make all these cookies. She and my Aunt Edie, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, all they would do is bake, bake, bake! Chocolate chip, some kind of strudel, Ram’s Horns which was a sugar cookie with walnuts! The amount of butter and sugar was sinful! Her raised yeast rolls were rolled in the palm of her hand.

So, here’s our last question: What does it mean to you to come back to the “homeland” and your relationship with the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum?

The entire reason for coming back to New Jersey was to work with the two of you, Elaine and Beverly. About three years ago, you invited me to a program about African American history in the region at Grounds For Sculpture. I enjoyed living in Cambridge, but there comes a time when you have to decide where you want to stay for the long term. In addition to wanting to be supportive, I knew I could make a contribution in any way you wanted me to. It allowed me to physically and emotionally commit to family again.

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Photo Credit: Catherine Fulmer-Hogan



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Thank you to the following Grantors, whose generous support for SSAAM has made it possible for us to achieve our mission.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation –

The Mt. Zion AME Church interpretive sign is being funded in part with a Franklin Parker Conservation Excellence Grant given by New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

New Jersey Council for the Humanities –

SSAAM's COVID 19 Response Grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the federal CARES Act, enabled us to continue to provide educational programming during the social distancing necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Jersey Historic Trust –

Our Preserve NJ Historic Preservation Grant from the NJ Historic Trust will fund the creation of a Site Master Plan for our joint venture with the Sourland Conservancy: Sourland Education & Exhibition Center.

The Bunbury Fund at PACF -

Our capacity building grant award for Resource Evaluation & Planning Grant enabled SSAAM to complete a strategic planning process and organizational evaluation.

Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission –

SSAAM's Historic Preservation Grant from Somerset County is funding restoration work of our historic register-listed Mt. Zion AME Church on Hollow Road, in Skillman.

Somerset County's County Historic Preservation Program –

SSAAM received this CHPP grant for general operating expenses in 2020 - Made possible with funds from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission, a partner of the New Jersey Historical Commission.