



Future Museum Site Moves Toward National Historic Designation

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

On March 8, 2018 the **New Jersey State Review Board for Historic Sites** unanimously approved the church's nomination by the **New Jersey Historic Preservation Office** at its meeting in the Department of Environmental Protection Public Hearing Room in Trenton. The next step is review by the **National Park Service** later in this year.

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

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