

# Mount Zion AME Church, future home of the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum

By Barbara A. Preston

The Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church on Hollow Road was built in Zion in 1866 and later moved to its current location in Skillman.

This month, the historic building will become The Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum — the only museum of its kind in Central New Jersey.

The building also will be reviewed by the National Park Service for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places later this year.

The museum's focus will be educating people about the unique culture, experiences, and contributions of the African American community living in the Sourland Mountain Region.

When the church was built, 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, according to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office.

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, according to the Register. The following is an excerpt from the nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places:

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. ■



Interior of the Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church on Hollow Road, which soon will open as a museum.