

# *Timbuctoo Historical Society*

## **Annual Programmatic Report for 2022 - 2023**

*Updated on January 26, 2024*

**Where are we now?**

**Where would we like to go?**

**How will we get there?**



## What exactly is Timbuctoo?

Today, Timbuctoo might be seen as just another rural neighborhood in Westampton Township. Timbuctoo also represents important milestones in American history. Timbuctoo was first settled when four formerly enslaved men from Maryland (David Parker, Wardell Parker, Ezekiel Parker and Hezekiah Hall) purchased parcels of land from a Quaker farmer named William Hilyard in September of 1826.

Over the next three decades, the community grew, and its residents established the African Union School, the Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal African Church, the Beneficial Society of the United Sons and Daughters of Timbuctoo and Vicinity, and other organizations. In 1830 and future decades, Timbuctoo residents were listed by name in each decennial census. As early as 1851, Timbuctoo residents read about themselves in local newspapers and were listed in official government birth and death records. Most Timbuctoo residents owned their land.

As a result of these documents, a plethora of records are available today that convey Timbuctoo's history and provide material for teaching this important narrative in schools.

### TIMBUCTOO A STOP ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Timbuctoo includes Church St. Blue Jay Hill Road, and adjacent areas. With the support of local Quakers, it was founded c1820 by free Blacks and runaway slaves. At its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, Timbuctoo had more than 125 residents, a school, an AME Zion Church, and a cemetery.

The key remaining evidence of this community is the cemetery on Church Street, which contains graves of Black Civil War Veterans. Some current residents are descendants of early settlers.

An example of this compelling local history is an 1100-word article about the Battle of Pine Swamp, in which Timbuctoo residents revolt against a would-be kidnapper who sought to capture area resident Perry Simmons and return him to enslavement in Maryland. The newspaper reports that the would-be captors were beat down by Simmons' Timbuctoo friends, and "they hastily retreated to their carriages," and "left the scene of their brilliant achievement as though 'Old Satan' was after them," clearly criticizing the effort to capture Simmons and siding with Simmons and his supporters. Narratives like this one and others embody resilience and victory in a topic that typically focuses on exploitation and misery. One of our priorities is to highlight victory, resilience, and achievement, while not minimizing the larger context of the horrors of enslavement.

# Welcome to our Annual Report!

We are excited to share our accomplishments and our vision for the future.

**Where are we now?**

**Where would we like to go?**

**How will we get there?**

This is a noted adage of strategic planning.

This is also how we measure success and identify areas needing improvement. To this end, here we review our activities to assess our progress and determine a path forward.

We also acknowledge and extend gratitude to our contributors and our volunteers. We could not do it without you! Please feel free to contact us at [info@TimbuctooNJ.com](mailto:info@TimbuctooNJ.com) with any feedback.

## **Our Mission:**

The mission of the Timbuctoo Historical Society is to seek, document, preserve, interpret, and perpetuate the history and heritage of Timbuctoo, an unincorporated community in Westampton Township, Burlington County, settled beginning in 1826 by formerly enslaved and free African Americans. The Timbuctoo Historical Society was founded by Timbuctoo descendant Guy Weston in 2019 as a New Jersey non-profit corporation. This organization was created to establish an independent mechanism to preserve and protect Timbuctoo. We carry out our mission through:

- **Preservation/Protection**
- **Research and Publication**
- **Education and Outreach**



## **Preservation and Protection Goals for 2023**

1. Submit application to list Timbuctoo on the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places.
2. Identify Cultural Resources Consulting firm for cemetery conservation and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey services.

### **Progress in 2023**

- Listing on the registers of historic places is a fundamental step in preserving historic properties; providing protection from encroachment from developers, etc., as well as access to additional funding opportunities that are designated for projects whose historic significance has been “validated.” An initial review draft of this application (40 pages plus attachments) was submitted in July 2023, and we expect the process to be completed in 2024.

- The National Park Service has a second designation for certain historic sites called the Underground Railroad Network of Freedom. That application is substantially less intense, and a final application was submitted in this case. Notification is expected in the Spring.
- The New Jersey Historical Commission has implemented a Black Heritage Trail project “to promote awareness and appreciation of Black history, heritage, and culture.” That application was submitted in January 2024.
- We met with Richard Grubb and Associates in November and executed a Memorandum of Agreement to begin working on a cemetery preservation project in Spring 2024.
- For 2024 we have also sought funding for fencing and other aesthetic enhancements at the cemetery as well as preservation and exhibition of vintage photographs dating to the 1930s. (approval pending)

## Research and Publications

### Goals for 2022-2023

1. Continue publication of research findings to contribute to research literature and provide material for use in our curriculum project targeting local schools.
2. Dissemination of publications through lectures, the Timbuctoo website, and other online resources.
3. Continue transcription/digitization and dissemination of 19th Century newspaper articles about Timbuctoo.

### Progress in 2022-2023

In 2022-2023 we authored or contributed to seven scholarly papers or book chapters on Timbuctoo. Most notably “Timbuctoo and the First Emancipation of the Nineteenth Century,” published in *New Jersey Studies* in January 2022, represents an important milestone. While only 8500 words, it is the most comprehensive history of Timbuctoo published to date and makes several extant legal documents and news reports available online for the first time.

We also have funding for a newspaper digitization project, through which we have identified twenty-four additional articles about Timbuctoo and/or related Black history. This information provides critical insights into local history, as well as providing material for our curriculum project. After digitization and/or transcription, the articles are placed on our website and will also be used in a journal article focusing on insights of 1800s Black communities from local newspapers .



Masthead from February 27, 1851  
issue of the New Jersey Mirror



**2023 Timbuctoo Curriculum Team at Burlington County Education Association meeting, April 2023 ; also authors of the "Teaching Timbuctoo" article below.**

## **Publications about Timbuctoo 2022-2023**

**Brenda Randolph with Guy Weston, "Rewriting Black History, Timbuctoo, New Jersey," Bouctou: *An Africana Magazine for Teachers and Students*, (by Brenda Randolph with Guy Weston) Fall 2023**

**Christopher Barton and Guy Weston , "Self, Service, and Social Activism: Community Archaeology at Timbuctoo, New Jersey" *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, (2023),**

**Guy Weston, "Black History Makers in Burlington County, New Jersey: Revolutionary War Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *AAHGS Journal*, Vol. 40 (2023): 96-106**

**Cheryl Alspach, JoAnn Donnelly, Kevin Risley and Guy Weston, "Teaching Timbuctoo: Raising the Profile of Antebellum Free Black People in New Jersey" *AAHGS Journal*, Vol. 39 (2023): 52-61**

**Guy Weston, "Finding My Fourth Great Grandmother and Her Contemporaries: Ann Barnes Bruer Hall, (1790s-1872)" *AAHGS Journal*, Vol 38 (2022):49-57**

**Forward to *Archaeology of Race and Class in Timbuctoo* by Christopher Barton, Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2022**

**Guy Weston, "Timbuctoo and the First Emancipation of the Nineteenth Century," *New Jersey Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 1 ( Winter 2022)**

# Education and Outreach

## Goals for 2022-2023

1. Conduct at least one workshop or presentation each month, targeting local historical societies, schools, and civic groups, as well as academic audiences
2. Expand presence on social media as measured by hits on website, followers on Facebook, etc.
3. Begin to track numbers of workshops/presentations resulting from social media presence

## Progress for 2022-2023

In 2022-2023 we delivered forty three presentations to 1936 individuals at local historical societies, community groups, churches, and schools, as well as academic settings in local and national conferences.

Highlights include New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), the Burlington County Association, (BCEA), as well as the Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).

In 2023 our website had 7999 visits and our Facebook page had 913 followers. The website visit number represents an increase of 23% over 6502 visits in 2022. We attribute the spike in website visits in October and November to a hyperlink in a New York Times article about Hannah Crafts, a formerly enslaved woman who is believed to have produced the first novel written by a formerly enslaved Black woman. Our website is hyperlinked because Crafts lived in Timbuctoo before moving to Burlington. Our 2024 grant applications include requests for funding to support:

- Development of a children's book about Timbuctoo (confirmed)
- Signage to commemorate 20th century Timbuctoo Pioneers (confirmed)
- Interpretive planning (confirmed) *This is a process used in historic preservation that identifies priorities and strategies to effectively interpret elements or aspects of history to the public.*



## Presentations in 2022 and 2023

### 2022

- William Trent House
- Westampton Historical Society
- Hampton Academy
- Sacred Heart School
- Andy Kim Town Hall
- *In The Telling*: Black Family Podcast
- Holly Hills School
- BCIT Medford Black Student Union
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- Medford Leas Residents Association
- Porch Club of Riverton
- Burlington County Historians Roundtable
- Hampton Academy
- Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, Somerset
- Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory
- Wesley AME Zion Church
- Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society (DC Chapter)
- Association for the Study of African American Life and History (National Conference)
- Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society (National Conference)
- New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) Annual Statewide Conference

### 2023

- Porch Club of Riverton
- Podcast Interview: Speak On It! History and Genealogy Conversations with Janice Gilyard and Cherekana Feliciano
- Rancocas Valley Regional High School
- WURD Radio Interview
- Medford Leas Residents Association
- Perkins Center for the Arts
- Oral History in the MidAtlantic Region (Regional Conference)
- Burlington Township High School
- Burlington County Education Association (BCEA)
- Burlington County May Faire
- Willingboro Democratic Club
- Rancocas Nature Center Photography Club
- Mount Laurel Historical Society
- Genealogy Quick Start (YouTube TV)
- Southampton Historical Society
- AAGHS Journal Author's Forum
- Mount Laurel Democrats
- Westampton Township Timbuctoo Day
- Sankofa Collaborative

## So how did we do...Where are we now?

The public profile of Timbuctoo is such that we rarely solicit invitations to do presentations. In fact, the only solicited presentations over the last two years have been conference presentations in which the sponsors solicit proposals. We maintain this visibility through the website (7999 hits in 2023; predominance of Timbuctoo, New Jersey Google searches associated with Timbuctoo Historical Society and/or Guy Weston). A substantial number of hits also go to our associate Dr. Chris Barton. Barton and Weston are also responsible for a majority of research papers published on Timbuctoo to date.

Our curriculum project extended this visibility to history education, through presentations at the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) meeting in Atlantic City in 2022, and the Burlington County Education Association (BCEA) in 2023, as well as presentations to students in local schools. In brief, we have established a presence history community, and we have metrics to measure that engagement. As we approach the 250th anniversary of our Republic, which is also the 200th anniversary of Timbuctoo's founding, we seek to promote an inclusive

historical narrative, using thoughtful strategies to engage the public and commemorate our history. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge we are building on a foundation that was initially established by Westampton Township's investments and prioritization of Timbuctoo under the administrations of Sidney Camp, Carolyn Chang, and Andre Daniels.

## Where would we like to go, and how will we get there?

Regarding education and outreach, we will continue the same activities described above. However, our curriculum project does not include a segment for young children. We decided to address that population with a children's book. We applied for funding from Burlington County to support that project in 2024, and we received notification of that funding in October 2023. We also need to do interpretive planning and cemetery preservation. Interpretive planning is a process used in historic preservation that identifies priorities and strategies to effectively interpret elements or aspects of history to the public. Put simply, if our cemetery is the only above ground evidence of Timbuctoo's history, how can we make Timbuctoo history engaging for the public? We have applied for funding to work on interpretive planning and cemetery preservation in 2024, and we signed a Memorandum of Agreement with cultural resources consulting firm Richard Grubb and Associates, to help us with this work. That's the plan for now. Also in 2024, we will implement a strategic plan to identify priorities and strategies for the next five years, and a fund development plan to identify resources to support and sustain our programmatic goals during this period.

## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



*Holly hit the ground running, learning all about preservation of gravestones, eventually cleaning all of the stones in our cemetery and our sister cemetery, "Old" Mount Moriah. She also mapped all of the stones in our cemetery, and researched the people interred. **WE SO APPRECIATE HER!!***

# ACKNOWLEDGING DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Pre-2023

## INDIVIDUALS

Chris Barton

**Geraldine Calhoun**

Neil Hutton

**Ken Masterton**

Robert and Joyce Payne

Martin Perrotta

Charlene Rogers

Loren Johnson Rosa

Cassandra Scott

Revs. Jerome and A. Marie Walker

Will Weston

Barbara Wood Richardson

## ORGANIZATIONS

Chesterfield Historical Society

Mount Moriah AME Church

**Northeastern Episcopal District of the  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**

**Riverfront Historical Society**

**Tabernacle Baptist Church**

Wesley AME Zion Church

*Bold indicates contribution of \$500 or more*

## VOLUNTEERS AND ADVISORS

Gail Astle

Carolyn Brown, PhD

Nancy Burkley

Janet Curran

Holly Draycott

Kristin O'Brassill-Kulfan, PhD

Kevin McGruder, PhD

Eric Orange

Kent Pipes

Paul W. Schopp

Sam Torres

Janet Sheridan

The Welby Family

Boy Scout Troop 117

Rancocas Nature Center

Wesley AME Zion Church

Westampton Township Historical Society

2023

## INDIVIDUALS

Gail Astle

Carol Austin

S. Otesia Barr

Stephanie Borum

Linda Epps

Maureen Gerald

Margaret Dorsey Jones

Katy Otto

Kent Pipes

Dave Saltzman

Edwin Walker

Randall West

Dionne Watts Williams

Sharon Wright

## ORGANIZATIONS

Porch Club of Riverton

Medford Leas Residents Association

Sankofa Collaborative

Southampton Historical Society

Underground RR Museum of Burlington County

### Board of Directors

Shannon DeLizio Bonilla

Kenneth Cruz-Dillard

Linda Caldwell Epps

Rev. Maureen Reed Gerald

Stephanie Toro

Mary Weston

### Staff and Consultants

Guy Weston,

*Managing Director*

Christopher Barton, PhD,

*Archaeology Consultant*

Cheryl Alspach,

*Curriculum Consultant*

JoAnne Donnelly,

*Curriculum Consultant*

Kevin Risley,

*Curriculum Consultant*

*The Timbuctoo Historical Society is a New Jersey, non-profit corporation, established in August 2019.*

**Tax deductible donations at  
[www.timbuctoonj.com](http://www.timbuctoonj.com)  
under Support our work  
or by scanning QR code**

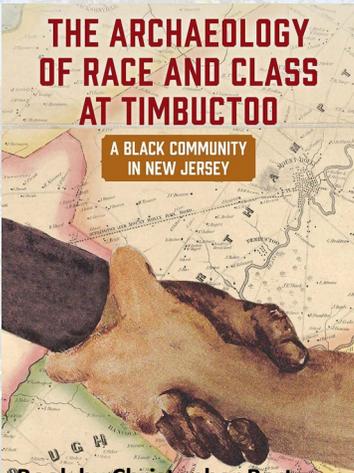


# Timeline of Notable Events in Preservation and Educational Activities on Timbuctoo

- 2006** Westampton Township Historical Society purchases and installs historic marker in the Timbuctoo Cemetery
- c. 2008** Bill Bolger of the National Park Service and David Orr of Temple University meet with Westampton Mayor Sidney Camp to discuss historic importance of Timbuctoo and the possibility of doing archeological research.
- 2009** Westampton Township Historical Society purchases and installs historic marker for the community of Timbuctoo; sign text is written by Guy Weston. A community advisory committee is formed under the name *Timbuctoo Discovery Project*. Mary Weston serves as chair of this committee. The committee includes subject matter experts, various community members, and descendants, and is charged with helping to plan archeological research and interpret findings. Westampton Township contracts with John Milner and Associates to conduct Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to identify areas of interest for archeological investigation.
- 2010-2011** Christopher Barton and Dave Orr of Temple University lead excavations at the homesite of US Colored Troops (USCT) Sgt. William Davis, identifying 15,400 artifacts. Local historians Paul Schopp and Damon Tvaryanas, both members of the *Timbuctoo Discovery Project*, conduct research to learn more about the history of Timbuctoo and assist with interpretation of archaeological findings. Based on research findings noted above, the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office issues a Certification of Eligibility for listing Timbuctoo on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places in March of 2011. Costs of excavation work were paid by Westampton Township.
- 2012-2014** The Timbuctoo Discovery Project continues to meet to plan research and interpretive activities. The first Timbuctoo Day event is conducted in 2014 (an educational celebration of Timbuctoo history and culture). Chris Barton and colleagues begin publishing papers of their research findings.
- 2015-2016** Westampton Township purchases a house in Timbuctoo for \$45,000, with the intent of creating a Timbuctoo museum in 2016. As of January 2024, the house is vacant and dilapidated. Westampton purchased an additional house for \$120,000 in 2015. This house was demolished the following year, incurring additional expense. In announcing the intent to purchase this property in December 2014, then Mayor Carolyn Chang told the Philadelphia Inquirer<sup>1</sup> that the township “wanted to acquire land so we can show the entire historic site. My hope is also to acquire property that includes access to the creek, which was used by the slaves, and would show how the community came about.” She also spoke of plans for walking trails with markers and historic events and educational programs. In 2022, the Timbuctoo Historical Society issued a statement criticizing the Township for refusing to pave Timbuctoo streets for residents, while planning walking trails for visitors.
- 2017** The Timbuctoo Advisory Committee partners with American Legion Post 509 to obtain funding to secure a road sign to identify Timbuctoo as a neighborhood within Westampton Township, similar to signs for Irick Woods, Tarnesfield, Rancocas Village, etc.

1. Philadelphia Inquirer December 1, 2014. Page A3

- 2018** The Timbuctoo Advisory Committee obtains funding from the County History Partnership Program (CHPP) to develop and install interpretive signage in the Timbuctoo Cemetery. Signs are written by Guy Weston and Gail Astle; design and layout by Guy Weston. Supplemental funding for the sign project was provided by Wesley AME Zion Church of Burlington and private donations. Sign installation is done by committee members and community volunteers. Sign project is featured on a front-page story in the Burlington County Times.
- 2019** The Timbuctoo Advisory Committee obtains funding from CHPP to develop curricula and materials about Timbuctoo and antebellum free Black communities. The project team includes teachers from Westampton Middle School (JoAnn Donnelly, Jennifer Perry, and Christina Burrows) and Rancocas Valley High School, (Cheryl Cliver Alspach, Neshea Thomas, and Kevin Risley), coordinated by Guy Weston. Initial project implementation is interrupted by the COVID pandemic but completed in 2020. The project receives a history project award from Burlington County in 2020, and is featured in Burlington County Times news stories in 2019 and 2020. The Timbuctoo Historical Society is incorporated as a New Jersey, non-profit corporation. Full implementation of the society is delayed by the COVID pandemic, but society is fully organized by 2021.
- 2020** The Timbuctoo Historical Society obtains funding from CHPP to support establishment of a mechanism to improve research activities to support nomination of Timbuctoo to New Jersey Register of Historic Places as well as for conducting educational activities to raise awareness about Timbuctoo's historic significance. The curriculum project was presented at Rancocas Valley regional professional development workshop for teachers. The Timbuctoo cemetery historic marker is modified to correct a naming error. The Timbuctoo Historical Society commissions a land survey of "old" Mount Moriah Cemetery to verify boundaries.
- 2021** Guy Weston resigns from the Timbuctoo Advisory Committee to manage the Timbuctoo Historical Society, attributes resignation, in part, to ineligibility of a municipal government for most community foundation and corporate funding sources and variability of support for Timbuctoo between different political administrations. The Timbuctoo Historical Society receives funding from CHPP to improve educational and awareness activities through social media and technology; also collaborates with Rancocas Nature Center on a joint fundraiser on Facebook. The Timbuctoo Historical Society obtains ownership of the Timbuctoo Cemetery
- 2022** The Timbuctoo Historical Society receives funding from CHPP to support further work on curriculum related activities and, the website, and educational materials. The curriculum was presented at the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) Conference in Atlantic City. *Timbuctoo and the First Emancipation of the Early Nineteenth Century*, is published in New Jersey Studies, representing the most comprehensive Timbuctoo history published to date; resulting from research supported by CHPP.
- 2023** The Timbuctoo Historical Society receives funding from the CHPP for educational activities, the Timbuctoo website, and a newspaper transcription project. The curriculum was presented to the Burlington County Education Association. Forty plus page application for listing Timbuctoo on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places submitted to Historic Preservation Office. Complete application for listing on Underground Railroad Network to Freedom presented to National Park Service. Multiple grant applications are submitted. One for development of a children's book about Timbuctoo is funded by Burlington County's Local Arts Program. Others are pending notification as of December 31, 2023.



Book by Christopher Barton



Christopher Barton



Mary Weston



Porch Club



Wesley AME Zion Church



Board Members