

**Timbuctoo Advisory Committee**  
**Westampton Township, NJ**  
**Report to Westampton Township Governing Body**  
**August 7, 2017**

### Mission

The purpose of the Timbuctoo Advisory Committee is to advise and assist the Township Committee, Land Development Board, all Municipal Departments, Committees and Officials on all issues related to the historic significance of Timbuctoo, according to Westampton Township Ordinance 6-2015.

### Historic Significance

Timbuctoo was founded in 1826 by former slaves and free Blacks with the assistance of Quakers. Evidence of this date is found in land records in the Burlington County Clerk's office, indicating that William Hilyard sold parcels to 4 former slaves from Maryland (David Parker, Ezekiel Parker, Wardell Parker, and Hezekiah Hall). Names are mentioned here to call attention to the fact that current Irick Woods resident Bart Parker is a descendant of these Parkers, and still owns one of David Parker's parcels. The next sale was in 1829 to John Bruere, who was Mary Weston's 3rd great-grandfather. Her house on Church St. is located on Bruere's parcel. The name Timbuctoo first appeared on deeds in 1831, was seen on maps as early as 1849, and continues to appear on maps today. In the next two decades, two churches and two schools were established. One of them was the Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church of Timbuctoo, which created a cemetery to bury its members and associates. The cemetery remains intact today, and has been termed "the only visible evidence of Timbuctoo's historic significance." The fact that most of the thirteen remaining gravestones were US Colored Troops has led to the recent name of *Timbuctoo Memorial Civil War Cemetery*. However, there are approximately 66 additional graves which no longer have the grave markers, many or most of which were wooden, as was common during that period. Most of these are presumed to be non-veteran church members. Veterans were more likely to have stone grave markers because they received them free as a death benefit. On this basis, a historically accurate name for the cemetery might be *Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church Cemetery*. The church is currently located in Burlington and is known as Wesley AME Zion Church.

Although New Jersey was the last northern state to abolish slavery by gradual manumission in 1804, Quaker influence accelerated manumission of slaves in southern New Jersey, where two-thirds of Black residents were free as early as 1790<sup>1</sup>.

On March 1, 2011, the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office issued a *Certificate of Eligibility Letter*, indicating that Timbuctoo

is eligible to be listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places for its "association with the emergence of rural, free Black communities in New Jersey" and for "the ability to contribute important information in African American History".

### Timbuctoo Advisory Committee Accomplishments 2017

- Reconnected with the Historic Preservation Office and established a timeline for submission of the application package for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Research is currently in progress to identify all supporting documentation.
- Obtained \$1000 grant from the Walmart Foundation to purchase and erect a sign marking the Church St. entrance to Timbuctoo. American Legion Post 509 serves as fiscal agent. The sign will be an enhanced version of existing signs for Tarnsfield, Irick Woods, Rancocas Village, etc. An additional \$500 was raised from individual donations.
- Re-organized and catalogued hundreds of archeological artifacts from found during excavations conducted by Temple University between 2009-2012. A total of 15,422 were artifacts recovered dating from the late archaic period to the 1970s. However, the bulk of the trash midden dated between 1910-1940. Many of the artifacts are currently stored in the municipal building. Working on development of a borrowing system is in process. Note: *While many are suitable for exhibition, others are broken glass, pottery, etc., that would only be appreciated by scholars. Some committee members believe that a small municipality like Westampton does not have the infrastructure to properly maintain a collection of artifacts of this caliber, including cataloging, proper storage, as well as monitoring a borrowing system that provides other community organizations with access to items for exhibition at educational events. Others are concerned that moving the items to a different location could result in loss of control and access by the Township, which provided financial support to the excavations that recovered the artifacts*
- Collaborated with Rutgers University (New Brunswick) History Department on various projects, including:
  - Virtual Student Exchange Program between Westampton Middle School and a school in Timbuktu,

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau US Census of Population and Housing, [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/overview/](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/). Accessed on May 20, 2015

Mali, in which students communicate via Skype. Currently in a pilot phase.

- Global Timbuktu Symposium at Rutgers University and Rancocas Valley High School in March 2017, which included scholars from Timbuktu, Mali, Johannesburg, South Africa, Toronto, Canada, and various US Universities, and our Underground Railroad Museum. A Follow up meeting is planned for Bamako, Mali, in 2018.
  - Public History Internship Program, which will provide undergraduate history students the opportunity for placement at a Burlington County organization. The other local collaborators are the Burlington County Lyceum, Parks Department, and Underground Railroad Museum
- At present, a broader academic partnership that would provide support for research project and development of educational materials is in the planning stages.

#### Goals for the Next Year

- Implement Timbuktoo Day on September 23. (September 23, 1826 was the date that William Hilyard sold 3 of the 4 parcels noted above). This year, we hope to have a more interactive program with minimal lecture and more entertainment: dramatic performances, spoken word, music, etc. We will also focus more attention on descendants of twentieth century settlers who are numerous
- Finalize process for listing Timbuktoo on the New Jersey and National registers of Historic Places. The outstanding deliverable is a substantial research report that may require as much as 100 hours of effort between two researchers.
- Continue development of collaborations with Rutgers University
- Develop a strategic plan, which would identify short and long-term goals and objectives on issues such as identifying mechanisms for administration and funding sources for smaller and larger projects.
  - An example of a possible smaller project would be interpretive signage in the cemetery area to describe the history of Timbuktoo
  - An example of a larger project would be a concrete plan for the disposition of two properties purchased by the Township in August 2015 and April 2016 for future Timbuktoo preservation efforts, including identification of funding support.

- Operationalize the mission of the Timbuktoo Advisory Committee as stated in the ordinance that created it.

#### Timbuktoo Advisory Committee Membership

Christopher Barton, Ph. D  
Denita Curry  
André Daniels  
Linda Cadwell Epps, Ph. D  
Rev. Cory Jones, D. Min.  
Machell Still Pettis  
Michelle Miller  
Lynda Williams  
Guy Weston, MA  
Mary Giles Weston