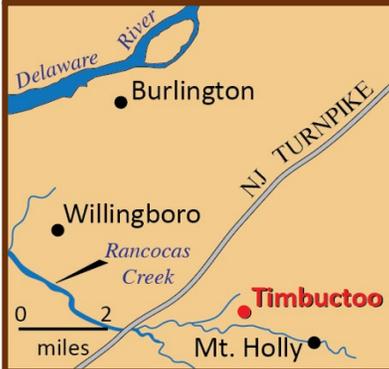


# Timbuctoo, NJ



**Where and what is Timbuctoo?** *Timbuctoo is an unincorporated community in Westampton Township, Burlington County, NJ, according to the US Geographic Names Information System. Timbuctoo was settled by formerly enslaved and free African Americans, beginning in 1826.*

**How do we know when Timbuctoo was founded?** *Deeds on file in the office of the Burlington County Clerk confirm that the first land purchases by African Americans in what is now known as Timbuctoo occurred in September of 1826<sup>1</sup>. The name Timbuctoo first appeared on a deed in 1830<sup>2</sup>. Many early settlers purchased their land from Quakers<sup>3</sup>.*

**Why was “Timbuctoo” chosen to name this antebellum community of formerly enslaved and free African Americans?** *Early nineteenth century African American and antislavery publications described Timbuktu in Africa as a great African civilization, a place of commercial wealth and opportunity, and a place where African youth were sent from great distances to further their education.<sup>4</sup> These descriptions contribute to our opinion that early Timbuctoo settlers may have chosen this name to reference their aspirations for the new community they were developing.*

**What else do we know about Timbuctoo’s development before the Civil War?** *Timbuctoo was a thriving community that established institutions, such as the African Union School (1834),<sup>5,6</sup> the Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal African Church and Cemetery (1854),<sup>6,7</sup> and the Beneficial Society of the Sons and Daughters of Timbuctoo and Vicinity (1856)<sup>6,8</sup> Census records suggest that Timbuctoo’s population was more than 125 people in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The 1880 Census identified Timbuctoo as a distinct village within Westampton Township, enumerating 108 residents in 29 households.<sup>10</sup> Timbuctoo was also an established stop on the Underground Railroad.<sup>11</sup> Although several aspects of the larger community indicate support for development of antebellum African American settlements,<sup>12</sup> Timbuctoo was also threatened by slavecatchers, who sought to “kidnap” anyone perceived to be formerly enslaved. Timbuctoo was well known for its “Camp Meeting” worship services. Attendees sometimes included whites from nearby communities.<sup>13</sup>*

**Who is buried in the Timbuctoo cemetery?** *Although eight of the eleven surviving grave markers in the cemetery are of US Colored Troops (USCT) who fought in the Civil War,<sup>14</sup> ground-penetrating radar conducted in 2009 identified at least 59 unmarked graves.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the oldest marked grave is a civilian woman, and is dated 1847,<sup>16</sup> 13 years before the Civil War. Early records indicate the cemetery was established by the Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal African Church for its members and associates.<sup>17</sup> In this context, USCT were buried there because of their affiliation with the church, not because it was ever a Civil War cemetery. USCT received stone grave markers as a benefit of military service. By contrast, rank and file citizens often had wooden grave markers, that would not survive time.*



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## Why is the history of Timbuctoo important to emphasize?

*Timbuctoo is well documented through Census records, newspaper articles, land records, and other legal documents. These records present compelling portraits of antebellum African American life with a level of detail typically not available for African Americans during this period. Much of this information challenges common misconceptions, such as the expectation that African Americans cannot find their ancestors in Census records or newspapers before the Civil War, or the notion that African Americans could not own land or establish schools. In brief, the history of Timbuctoo recounts victories, accomplishments, resilience, and self-determination, in addition to the struggles, challenges and abuse and violence that are all too familiar in antebellum African American history. More information about Timbuctoo, including its location, and contact information for educational programs, can be found at [www.TimbuctooNJ.com](http://www.TimbuctooNJ.com)*

## Notes

1. Guy Weston, "New Jersey: A State Divided on Freedom," Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Volume 34 (2018): pps. 2-3
2. Ibid., p.3
3. Ibid., p.2
4. W. Caleb. McDaniel "In Search of John Brown's Timbuctoo," Off Prints: A History Blog by Caleb McDaniel, <http://mcdaniel.blogs.rice.edu/?p=46>. Accessed on 12 March 2017. pps 4-6
5. Weston, "New Jersey: A State," 3.
6. Since incorporation of churches and community organizations was a relatively new phenomenon in this era, incorporation dates may not reflect an entity's founding, which, in some cases, may have been years earlier.
7. Ernest Lyght, "Path of Freedom: The Black Presence in New Jersey's Burlington County 1659-1900," (Cherry Hill. E & E Publishing House, 1978), p. 68
8. Burlington County, New Jersey, Corporation Certificates, A 185:186, "Beneficial Society of the Sons and daughters of Timbuctoo and Vicinity," 14 March 1856; Burlington County Clerk's Office, Mount Holly
9. Lyght, "Path of Freedom," 40
10. 1880 US Census; Timbuctoo, Burlington, New Jersey; Roll: 772; Family History Film: 1254772; Page: 296-298B; Enumeration District: 022; Image: 0596, Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed 15 December 2014).
11. "Steal Away, Steal Away: A Guide to the Underground Railroad in New Jersey," New Jersey Historical Commission (Trenton, not dated) p.3
12. Weston, "New Jersey: A State", p.2
13. "Timbuctoo," The New Jersey Mirror, 21 June 1855
14. Gail Astle, "US Colored Troops in the Timbuctoo Cemetery," TimbuctooNJ.com, <https://timbuctoonj.com/us-colored-troops-bios> Accessed 3 April 2019
15. William J. Chadwick and Peter Leach, "Geophysical Survey of Timbuctoo, Westampton Township, NJ," John Milner and Associates, (West Chester, 2009), p.33
16. Weston, Guy O. "Timbuctoo-A Free Black Community in New Jersey." AAHGS Newsletter, November 20, 2017, 5-6.
17. Burlington County, NJ, Deeds, E6:256, Peter Coppuck to David Parker, et al, 2 May 1854; Burlington County Clerk's Office, Mount Holly