

Bennett, Mary Jane

4. The fanner basket (01:41)

<Video begins with a close up of a woven basket>

M.J. Bennett: My grandmother told me, that her mother told her, and her grandmother told her, that it came from Africa or West Africa during the sixteen and seventeen hundred, during the time they brought the black people over from Africa.

<Camera focuses on M.J. Bennett>

And those people was sold to Boone Hall Plantation, over on Boone Hall. And they said it was a-a rice plantation and uh, they planted rice and was a no uh, mill to hull the rice out.

<Camera shows black and white photographs of plantation life before returning to M.J. Bennett>

And said they, people would go in the woods and cut a big tree down and hollow the center of the tree and after they hollowed the center of the tree, they would cut another tree down, and they cut the center off, and um, cut the middle part of the-um that the hand could get around and left two large end on like a pestle.

<Camera shows photograph of a woman and child using homemade mortars before returning again to M.J. Bennett>

And then they would put the rice in the-the big one, you know, and take the other one and beat it on the rice after it dry, and put it in there and after that they-they just decide how to get the hull away from the [shaft]. And then um, some of the slave men then gone in the river and they gather some bulrush and they make the big, wide, flat, fanner basket-

<Camera shows photograph of women using the fanner baskets>

-We call it the fanner basket-and they take the rice and put it in there and they begin to [run] it like that *<makes a fanning motion with the basket>*. You know, and the husk blew away and left the whole-grain rice in the fanner. And that's the way they separate the rice from the husk.