

Transcript: MINNIE KENNEDY: TOUR OF FRIENDFIELD VILLAGE

**Interviewer: BETSY NEWMAN (with Executive Producer Amy Shumaker and
Camera Operator Lynn Cornfoot)**

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Location: FRIENDFIELD VILLAGE, HOBCAW BARONY

Length: 45 MINUTES

Minnie is leading a tour of Friendfield Village for a group of students from a local school and the SCETV crew.

MK: Whenever you want me to start let me start, because I'm going to tell you about this little house.

BN: Okay, well we're just waiting for Amy to come back with the reflector.

MK: It's really amazing. In this village, it was more crowded than it is now. Well when Belle took over, she tore down a lot of buildings. She had the building I was born and grew up in torn down. She didn't need them, anyhow.

BN: That's too bad though. It'd really be interesting if they were still there. And it's historically important. It's really too bad she tore it down.

MK: Yep. And you probably noticed by now, how I'm with family, family, family. Got that whole thing starting with my parents all the way- people who were with my family, their children, their children's children, all the way down. And the last row were people who married into the family, that last row on that (*probably referring to her hand-drawn map, Minnie's World*)—that I made. And I love that--(cuts abruptly)

Minnie is standing in front of Laura Carr's dwelling, built in 1840. The crew is setting up a reflector and positioning Ms. Minnie.

MK: It's amazing how people call this a cabin, and generally when I read about it, it's called the "slave cabin." This was the home of my mother's father's second wife's mother. Let me start from the beginning now. My mother's mother died before we were all born, even before she was married, I guess. And her father, lived in a house next door- (points) I think a house is missing there. And her father married another woman, named Hannah. This was Hannah's mother's HOUSE. She lived in there! I mean what we all need for sleeping and cooking and all was in this little—and I get so amazed when I read about the history of all these places, how they call people's home a "slave cabin". Every time I see it, I sort of shake. It was people's home, you know?

So anyhow, this was Laura's home, and Laura was the mother of my grandfather's second wife. She lived in this cabin. And right next door to her, was a house that her son-in-law lived in. And he had more children, (mumbles) like my mother's second—step mother's children. They were right next door, next to Laura's house. Some buildings are not here anymore, you know, that I grew up and knew about... So Laura lived here and her daughter, who was married to my grandfather, lived next door. And that house isn't there anymore...If anybody want to ask question ask because, you know...Okay, I don't know if these buildings are locked-

Amy Shumaker: That one is open.

MK: This one is open?

AS: Yes mam.

Minnie steps up and opens the door. She steps inside and looks around.

MK: It probably looks to you like a dollhouse or something. In this little house, Laura cooked, slept, everything. There's a tiny little room, it was her bedroom. And most people, including Laura, they cooked in the fireplace. They had things hooked up in the fireplace, and it hung on some kind of a structure they put in there. And the fire was right under your pots, and you cooked in the fireplace. There was no stove in here. She warmed herself, kept herself comfortable, by the fire from this place. And I always was- from the time, I guess I moved away or something, I just couldn't really accept wholeheartedly the whole thing with the slave cabin. It wasn't a "slave cabin", it was my parents' home! And my grandmother's home! They cooked and slept, and lived there. And a cabin is where we, in this modern time, spend a night to go fishing or something.

But this was a—when my mother's mother died, her father married to Hannah. Hannah was Laura's daughter, so my mother had a stepmother then. And Laura lived here. Her son lived next door. That house is gone. It was right next door to this one. We all knew Laura, she was an old lady, lived all by herself. On Sunday we came into this village, to go to church, and we would run to get a drink of water from Laura, with her house and all. She was a senior citizen, a real elderly person, and did her own cooking, her own ironing, whatever. Because I think most people are independent anyway. Most families. They had their own little garden in the back of their house.

Where we lived, on what they called the hill, next to Baruch's house, we had a big garden in the back, raised all the fruit. We had peach trees, pear trees, mulberry trees, and all kinds. My mother, and all these women who lived on this plantation canned foods. Canned fruits in the summer, in the winter they didn't have to buy and kind of apples and oranges. "Go to the storehouse and bring me a can of peaches." They had everything. All the women knew how to cook and put up things. Now I can understand why the women learned to do all those things, because they didn't have any money to buy anyhow. So they had to live on the natural environment. All the trees, they either had peaches growing, or pears growing, or something was growing. And people learned the things they could eat, and they took advantage. Grapes or anything.

I remember, we used to sit on the steps, about the middle of March, sitting on steps, waiting for summer, and our house, my mother's kitchen was right next door, so we could talk to her from sitting on the steps, and she's in her kitchen. Start about the middle of March, sitting on this step, "Ma, can we take our shoes off?" "No, it's too cold!" Next day or next week, "Ma, can we take our-". "No it's too cold!!" So on the day when she said yes, oh God, you should see all the shoes on the ground. And we'd go in the woods, and you'd come home, your face is blue, and red, and all, from eating berries all day long. We could go out by like ten in the morning, and don't come out of the woods till about three or four o'clock. Eating all that thing, and in our own back garden, we had peach trees, pear trees, mulberry bushes, everything. The only thing people used to have to go into Georgetown to buy was like rice, and grits, because we didn't know how to grow those kinds of things. But people were so independent, and raised what they needed. They were just natural farmers and- (to a kid in the crowd) are you waving at me? Okay, so this- oh you want me to answer a question, right? Can they ask questions? Yeah, sure.

Little Boy: Was it the- you say that you're the twelfth sister, and where's the thirteenth one?

MK: Yeah my parents had thirteen children, I was the twelfth one.

Little Boy: Where's the other one?

MK: I'm the only one living. All of my family are dead. They're gone. My parents are gone, all of my sisters are gone, my one brother, I had one brother, he's gone. I'm the last one. I'm the last one, and I'm ninety-three, so you know you better enjoy me today, because tomorrow I might not be here. (Children clap and wave goodbye.)

Minnie is talking to a photographer as she stands on the steps of one of the "slave cabins."

MK: The last time I was here, I came on a trip to tell people about the plantation. That must have been maybe, I guess, maybe ten years ago. But all the- (crew adjusts the reflector on Minnie) You were up in the area where Baruch's house is right? And my house, where we grew up was right up beside the gate from Baruch's house, and we walked from wherever we had to go in all these villages. From our house, right outside the gate from Baruch's house, walked to school. When I was three and four years old, I walked from what they call "the hill" to Strawberry to go to school.

You know the reason why I'm so small? Because I went to school before I was three years old. No but my parents worked, and so all kids had to go wherever the kids need to be. That's why, one chapter in a book that a friend wrote about me, one chapter's called "You Dat Smart One". Because in all of these villages, where the black people were living, there was such a low level of education that when some of the relatives moved away, young people got married and moved away, I had to read to people their letters that they got from their children who moved away. When they want to write to their kids, they'd call me to write a letter for them. That's where I got the nickname, "that smart one". I used to do it for all the people we knew.

So anyway, when my mother died, a few years ago, she died at ninety-four. I brought her body back here to bury next to her husband. And I went into one of the women's home, she was ninety-eight at the time, I must have been about forty or something, so I went into her house, she was in Arcadia. When I walk in the door, she hadn't seen me since I was a little girl, when I walk into her house she said, "Oh God, looka Minnie." I said, "You remember me?" She said, "Course I-", this is the Gullah-talk speak, "Course I remember you. You Daisy daughter, you dat smart one." I mean I had that name since I was little, because I used to read for them, write for them, you know the whole thing. And it was just amazing.

BN: Ah Minnie, I'm wondering if we could get a shot of you walking just along the road here.

MK: Let me close this door. Bye Laura!

Minnie shuts the door and begins to walk along the Friendfield Village Road.

MK: This got all wooded- It was cleared up way back in there. When you came in here, you could see the church. Now it's all wooded, all these trees grew up big and fat. That was a wooded area over there. Here I am, in Friendfield, where I came to church here, came to the doctor's office. The doctor came from Georgetown once a week; I hope his office is still here. You could only be sick on Wednesday, because that was the only day the doctor came. So we would walk in here to the doctor, get some medicine or whatever, and way down this road, another maybe eight or ten miles, is an area we called the "seashore". It's on the ocean level. And my mother would spend the summer there, to cook for Powell, who was the superintendent of the whole plantation, and I was a little girl, and I used to walk with my mother all the way from the area we called the "hill", where Baruch's house is, all the way down this road to the edge of the ocean.

And my mother was Powell's cook for the summer, and I remember as a little girl, I'm sleeping and we heard a knock on the window, and my mother looked out and it was Powell trying to get my mother to come into his compound down there so he could have sex with my mother. Because he was having sex with some of the black women. I had first cousins who were daughters of Powell, who was a white guy. Anyhow, I would walk with my mother, I don't know how many miles it is from Baruch's house to the seashore, miles down this road. Have any of you been? No? There is a house missing, because there is Hannah's house was here, and there was another house. This whole area was housing. I don't know two houses are missing from there, that's what it looks like. That's the church. Oh my God.

Oh wow, we would- in the nighttime we'd come to church service, on Sunday we came to church service. Oh my, I'm going inside this church. If it's open. Oh no I see a lock on it. We can't get in. (Minnie tries to open the door.) It's locked. (She looks into the window.) This looks like a little school or classroom or something with all those bulletins.

I guess they use it to tell tourists about it. This church was full of all the black people. Some of them were Baptists and some were Methodists. One Sunday, the Methodists would use the building, the next Sunday the Baptists would use the building and that's how it went. But everybody came every Sunday because there was nothing else to do anyway. So you didn't know who was Methodists and who was Baptists – they all came every Sunday to church.

Many of the ministers were local. Local men. Everybody go to church when the doors open, there was no Methodists whatever – and then they had some of the local men, because my mother's father, he was just an unregistered minister, but he was really a minister. And we used to love him because he just seemed so honest a person, and he came to our house to visit, because my mother was his daughter, and when we saw him coming up that hill to our house, we would run to meet him because in his pocket he had candy for us! It was a treasure. He was a real human being, and loved kids, and especially loved his grandchildren. And we all loved him. He was a great man. And the whole village, everybody liked him, because he was such an honest minister, honest person.

I miss all those people, and God blessed me for having had them in my life. Because I don't think that I would be the kind of person that I feel that I am without having had those people in my life, because they had nothing else to do except to be honest. Where were they going to go to be dishonest? There was no place. If they took something that didn't belong to them, they ended up in jail, so people learned to be honest with each other. I grew up in such a situation. Thank you. (Minnie is handed water as clip ends)

Minnie is sitting on the steps of the old church drinking her water.

MK: So this was my home. Friendfield Village. We came at night when there were services, especially holiday eve, like Christmas Eve, everybody in the village and all the villages would come to this church and have its church service. When midnight comes we all knew that the next minute would be Christmas because it's another day. So when it was close to twelve o'clock at night, the eve would be over and the next minute would be

Christmas day or New Year's Day, or whatever big holiday it was. So on Christmas Eve, everybody in the village was in this church. Baptists, Methodists, old, young, and whoever, there was nowhere else to go.

And then it was time for me to be born. It was such a night. Christmas Eve, my mother was at home, trying to bring this baby into the world. And when I was born, when I could understand what she was telling me, she used to tell me how sad she was that she couldn't have been participating in those times, because everybody was together. I said, "But Mom, look what you got!" She said, "Yeah, take a look." It wasn't her happiest time. Any holiday, on the eve of those holidays, everybody in the villages would come to this church and have services. And then there would strike the bell to let you know it's midnight, and then you know it's another day starting.

I don't think that growing up in that situation with those people, with my parents and all the rest, cousins and this and that, I don't think that we let children realize how fortunate we were to have such parents and such people who were so dedicated to religion, to right and wrong and all. The sad part was that the part of the lives that they had to read to know about, they couldn't read. That was the sad part. So they made up like their own laws or rules for living together. So it was their way of saying, "You can't do that that's wrong." And we grew up in that kind of situation. And if you're interested I'll tell you a little bit about the difference between becoming a Christian in our lives growing up on this plantation, than the way that people declare that they are Christian in these days. I think it was part of what we got from our African heritage.

You had to pray to God, and you couldn't be drinking liquor or whatever, you couldn't do anything that was declared a sin during that period. We took a blanket, go out of your house, into the wooded area. Lay down, pray, pray, pray to God. "Please, make me a Christian, please I want to be good, please." That was the prayer, the essence of the prayer. Then, my mother used to be sort of the guidance for the children who wanted to become Christian. So she made all of us go through that process. So she would come wake us up, sleeping on the ground outside, praying to God, asking for all kinds of forgiveness or whatever, and she would come and get us, all the kids who were under her guidance, didn't

have to be her own children, take us in the house. We go to sleep. Wake up in the next morning, we had to tell someone who was already a declared religious person, tell them your dream. And then they interpreted the dreams, and say "Oh you're almost ready", "this means-", and whatever.

If you dream about a specific person, in a dream, your guidance person, my mother was one of them, they would be thinking this person, God was making your guide for the rest of your life. So we called these people "Pa", if it was a male, or "Ma", if it was a female. So they were sort of your God-sent guide to take you through the rest of your life. I remember my dream about one of these men, they used to live right next to this church. His name was Edward, and I dreamed about him several times. They declared that in my dream, that God was making him my religious guidance, so he became my "Pa". For the rest of my life growing up on the plantation with the same people, he was my guide. And you couldn't, he was like God-sent, so it was very difficult to lie in his presence or to do anything that was a sin. Because God sent him to you, you can't do that, because he has his avenue to God. So he's the one that keep you and God together.

So it made us as children and young people, getting religion enough to be called a Christian. And then you came to church, after they decided that the dreams they interpret seems that you are close to what you need to be in God's eye. So then they would take you to a church service, and you would make your declaration, and you would tell the whole congregation that you are a Christian, and they accept you as a Christian. And we were like ten, eleven, twelve years old. So once they determine that you have become a Christian, you were as responsible as anybody in this community. So I was like eleven years old when I went through that period of becoming a Christian. And in the church there were all these people, grown-up, "Minnie would you lead us in prayer." "Oh my God, prayer!?" You become a full-fledged responsible Christian, and they assign any duty that they assign to a ninety-year-old who'd been in church forever. You had become a Christian, and you pledged yourself to God that you are a Christian.

Minnie gets up from the steps and points.

MK: In this building, there was an old lady that lived by herself. She had a son, who had grown up and moved to Georgetown.

Lynn Cornfoot (SCETV camera operator): The building with the red awning?

MK: Yeah. And her name was...oh God what was it- But I know she had a son named David. And a son lived in Georgetown named Kuffee. And she lived in that house, an old lady. Miss- not Laura, Laura was that house. Oh God, what was her name? One old lady lived there, and she didn't go to church, she didn't mix with anybody. She was just an old lady sitting on her porch, and we would go sit. Nobody's talking to her or anything and she isn't talking to anybody, and we would just sit, take a breather from the church service and come back and go back to church. But she was this old lady, and all of these houses, you know what irks me is they call these people's homes "cabins." I don't like it at all, because these are people's homes. That's where they wake up in the morning and leave and go to work, and come home and make dinner, and feed their family. Many of them had to go into the woods for bathroom, but that was there home. So I get kind of irked when they call it the "slave cabin". It's not right, these were these people's homes, and it was complete. They slept there, they cooked there, and they eat there. So that was one of my gripes...

But they tore down some of these houses, because there was another house like that one, in between there. There was, let me tell you, (she points) Laura's house, there was a house next door, my mother's father's house, and I guess it was- it wasn't this house, because it was just the same- yeah, they moved it, that's what happened, because these two houses were next to each other. And this was- Oh God, what was that old lady's name? She lived alone here. Then, in between, was another family's house named John and his wife Ella, I think her name was. Those two houses together were like twin houses.

So I think what they did, is to move this house from over there, because it was like that house. There was a couple raising children, lived in a house like that one, it was over

there, with their children, and next to that was a Logan family, John and Ella Logan. I knew all those people, and I can't think of this old Lady's name, who was there. We would come take a breath from church, and go sit on her porch. It was like all of these people were one family. We couldn't tell lies to anybody, because everybody knew everybody, and everybody was raising us. There was no such thing as mom and dad. When they were not there, somebody was taking responsibility. And we grew up in that kind of situation, you know? People don't even say, "I'm going to tell Daisy," they just did what they had to do, if you were doing some kind of behavior. So we all felt like we had more mothers, more fathers than we wanted. (Laughs) Because we couldn't lie to anybody, because nobody would let you do it, whether your mother or dad. It was like all the grownups were mothers and fathers to all the children.

I mean, it's almost bringing tears to my eyes, because I had sort of forgotten about all of that. The people who got married, got married in this church, my older sister got married in this church. And she married a local guy, who lived in the area called Barnyard. His name was Rainey Gardner. Her children all live in the New York, New Jersey area. And it's amazing how some of their behavior, as grownups, has sort of- you would think they grew up on this plantation, some of them. They couldn't do something that was wrong, because somebody would know. Because we grew up thinking every woman could tell you what to do, and every man could tell you what to do. Mother and father was just who you were born to. But the people who raised you and took care of you were ALL the people. They didn't even have to, "I'll tell your mother," like people have to do today. They beat you right there. They make you go get the switch. (Laughs) Because my dad used to send me when we make some kind of mistake, "Go get me a switch!" You have to go get the switch to give him to beat you with. I thought, "That's stupid." So when he'd send me, I'd get the tiniest stick I could find. (Minnie laughs.)

Minnie is walking outside the Logan house.

MK: This was John and Ella Logan, and they had children. John Logan was one of the juniors, their oldest son. They had a baseball team here that was competing with the baseball team from Arcadia, from Emerson's plantation. See, there was no empty space like this. There was a house like this, next to this one, and here was either a house or road. There was no such space like this. (Laughs)

BN: Let's go see if we can get in the front of this house.

MK: Oh the one here?

BN: This one right here, with the windows. Right here.

MK: Now this one is the McCants family. And the oldest daughter from this house married a guy who lived in area called Barnyard. It's like they did an exchange, the daughter from this house married a guy from the other village. And the daughter from that married the son from that. So it was like this village and this plantation provided husbands and wives for each other. It was really strange. We never even thought of that. It was really strange. Some of the people that got married, and they lived in Georgetown, but we kept in touch with each other.

BN: Should we see if we can get in the front here?

MK: I don't think anything is locked. This was John and Ella's house, and next to this was my grandfather's and his wife's house. And the two buildings looked alike. (Minnie walks up the stairs) Oh my, they got this locked. (Minnie looks into the window) They got the door locked on this one, so it must have been used. It looks like somebody would have their lunch in there. With the chair and the table. My goodness. See? All the cooking was done from the fireplace. No such thing as a kitchen and stove and oven and all that. No

such thing. They cook on that fireplace. Hey, somebody's using this, there's a bed there.
See the places that are locked must be being used.