

## **All mentions of Susanna Abrahamson ("Bottom Belly") Fireburn Interrogation records**

*The following is a collection of excerpts from the 6 books of interrogation records (1787-1880). The collection consists of 10 passages in which there is mention of Susanna Abrahamson.*

*Susanna Abrahamson was sentenced to death for participation in looting and arson in Frederiksted during the revolt 1878. The verdict was later commuted to hard labor in prison for life. She was transferred to "Christianshavns prison" in Copenhagen, Denmark, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1882, and was sent back to St. Croix on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1886.*

1. 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1878 (book 1)
2. 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1879 (book 4)
3. 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1879 (book 4)
4. 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1879 (book 4)
5. 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1879 (book 4)
6. 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1880 (book 6)
7. 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1880 (book 6)
8. 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1880 (book 6)
9. 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1880 (book 6)
10. 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1880 (book 6)

### **Mention #1 Susanna (book 1)**

#### **Saturday the 7th of December 1878**

(...) **Susanne<sup>164</sup> Abrahamsen**, called **Bottom Belly**, from Pl. Prosperity, appears. She is charged with participation in the excesses by the Customs House /: Frederiksted Police Interrogation of the 13<sup>th</sup> of October :/. She states that she clearly remembers what was testified against her during the interrogation in Frederiksted, but that she did not participate in the excesses in the way which was stated there. She states that she is a milk seller at Prosperity, but that her earnings are so poor /: 23 Cts. a week apart from allowance :/ that she makes up for it by selling some grass which she collects in the sugarcane field. On the Tuesday evening in question, she came to town with her bundle of grass on her head, and at the Fort between this and Controlleur Birch's house, she came across a mob of people who were standing in a cluster or more like a circle, as if they were deliberating about something. When the detainee, who did not know that something was up in town, walked towards them, one of them accosted her and yelled what she wanted and which side she was on. When she replied that she had just come in to sell her grass and wasn't on any side, the man struck the grass off her head with his cane and also struck her twice so that the blood streamed down, and he forced her to "join the ring<sup>165</sup>". So, she had to stay in the cluster, where the men - there were not a lot of women in the cluster - yelled that the boats had been sent away from the harbor so that they couldn't get away, and that at the Police Chamber, they demanded \$3 for a pass and \$5 for passage, and that 11 Cts. a day could not pay for it, so therefore they wanted to "make Destruction in town<sup>166</sup>", and all in all, as the detainee expresses herself, they were very "cross<sup>167</sup>". Under the mentioned threats and the cry "our side<sup>168</sup>" the crowd moved slowly towards the Custom House building towards the side which faces merchant Robertson's house. There was a window there with no shutters, whether there were "blinds", she does not remember, but she thinks there were bars in the windows. Here, the crowd began to hit - no one had

other weapons apart from canes - what the detainee thinks were the bars, but they did not get through the windows. However, some of them pulled out the bed netting with their canes and ripped it to shreds, and they threw the shreds onto the street. The detainee saw some boys pick up the shreds and fasten them onto canes and they danced along with them at the front of the crowd. The detainee is certain that the crowd drifted off again without anyone being inside the room, and she was particularly not inside the room herself, and she had nothing in her hands, and she did not participate in the attempt to break through the window. In no way was she in the front of the gang, on the contrary, she shamed them. When the crowd left the place and went up Kongensgade instead, the detainee left them and went home to Prosperity. She thinks that because she is a milk seller, many people in town know her, whilst none of the country negroes are known by anyone, and that is probably why she has been informed against. She is certain that the Barbados people started the riots. In the mob, she knows Thomas Graydon and a little fellow whose name she does not know but who was also shot. A third, who was employed at La Grange, she also believes was shot. The detainee says that the clock just struck 7 when she parted with the gang, and before she went home, she went down to the beach to wash off the blood.

The detainee also states that on Wednesday morning, in a sugarcane field at La Grange, where she was picking grass, she stumbled over something which, when she looked closer, turned out to be half a piece of skirting, and along with it was also 3 children's hats, some pearls, a couple of wooden tobacco pipes, 1 shirt and 1 trouser leg. She brought the things back home and has not since had the opportunity to hand them in (...)

#### **Mention #2 (book 4)**

**Tuesday the 21st of January 1879**

(...) **Susanne<sup>97</sup> Abrahamson alias Bottom Belly**, claims that in the Arrest down in Frederiksted, detainee Agnes had spoken about who it was who at Carlton had thrown the soldier from Skeorch Gallery down into the yard, but the others in the Arrest had told her that she was not to give up any names, and in particular not the one name, as he had just gotten married (...)

#### **Mention #3 (book 4)**

**Friday the 23rd of May 1879**

(...) Detainee **Susanne Abrahamson, called Bottom Belly**, appears. When presented with the fact that a large amount of the obtained information about her is about her being active during arsons all night, she states that Prosperity's manager at the time, John Mac Govern, and the guardsman Francis Johnson, will testify that she had been at home at Prosperity all night, and she is led away (...)

#### **Mention #4 (book 4)**

**Tuesday the 27th of May 1879**

(...) Thomas Johnson from Pl. Prosperity /: V.E.D<sup>344</sup>. :/ appears. He is, at the moment, hospitalized at Richmond's sick institution with a bad foot. Detainee **Susanne Abrahamsen, alias Bottom Belly**, has

stated that he, who is a night guardsman at Pl. Prosperity, saw her for a great deal of the night, at home, at the plantation, and that he could thus testify that she was not in town during the fireburn. He is enjoined as a witness and then states that he was on guard up at the house at Prosperity on the fireburn night, and that he knows Bottom Belly well. He saw her walk towards town on Tuesday afternoon or evening. After that, he did not see her again until the next morning around about 7 o'clock, when he walked past her house, and she was sitting in the doorway. She showed the witness, or at least he saw, that she had blisters on her legs. He did not ask her how she had come to be burned, because he had been sent on an errand down to the cooking house, and he had no time to spare. Also, he could easily comprehend that she had been burned during the fireburn in town. Stands down (...)

#### **Mention #5 (book 4)**

##### **Friday the 6th of June 1879**

(...) Because of detainee **Susanne** [Folio 267b-268a, notice 264] **Abrahamson's /: Bottom Belly :/** statement that she had been seen at home on Tuesday evening, and after the guardsman Francis Johnson /: 27th of the previous month :/ has been led away, information is sought from planter Mac Govern, who states that he did not see the detainee on the night in question. However, planter Roberts has stated that from his window, he saw Bottom Belly come walking from town with a bundle under her arm on the morning of the 2nd of October at approximately 7 o'clock.

Detainee Susanne Abrahamson /: B. Belly :/ continues to claim that Johnson did indeed see her, and that what she was carrying on Wednesday morning was some T...<sup>356</sup>s which she had wrapped in a piece of cloth /: cf. interrogation of the 7th of December :/. It is true that she did have some blisters on her legs on Wednesday morning, but they were from some boiling "pigeonpeas<sup>357</sup>" which she had spilled. She is presented with the fact that various people have testified that they have both seen and heard her in different places in town during the night, but she maintains that she did not participate in any arson. She was in town only once during the night - Prosperity is situated close to the town - but on that occasion, she helped to bring water to a pump on the square, that is, probably before midnight. Detainee led away (...)

#### **Mention #6 (book 6)**

##### **Friday the 4th of April 1880**

(...) The above mentioned governmental document of the 5th of this month is presented, according to which 40 people are to be charged with participation in the riots which took place in October 1878 and with criminal actions which took place in this connection, namely:

1. James Emanuel Benjamin (Mannie) from Mt Pleasant
1. John Hodge from Fredensborg
1. George Henry from Sprat Hall
1. Francis Harrison from Prosperity
1. Emanuel Jacob from Prosperity
1. David Cameron from La Grange
- 1. Susanna Abrahamson al. Bottom Belly from Prosperity**
1. Isaac Anthony from Frederiksted
1. Axelina E. Salomon (Agnes) from Bethlehem

1. Mathilda Mc Bean from Cane
1. Joseph Bowell from Høgensborg
1. Joseph Spencer from Høgensborg
1. Hans Christian from Williams Delight
1. John Thomas Sobers from Beck's Grove
1. Christopher Samuel from Mt Pleasant (Plessens)
1. George Michael from Envy
1. Thomas Critchlow from Jealousy
1. William James from Grove Place
1. George Callender from Enfield Green
1. Henry England from Jealousy
1. William Arnold from Upper Love
1. William Barnes from Rust up Twist
1. George Simons from Barren Spot
1. Richard Gibbs (Sealy) from Barren Spot
1. Edward Lewis from Mt Pleasant
1. Henry Barker from Høgensborg
1. Joseph Briggs from Fredensborg
1. William Henry from Lower Love
1. Christian Martin from Lower Love
1. Wren Gillens from Lower Love
1. George Cambridge from Upper Love
1. James Cox from Diamond
1. Joseph William from Windsor
1. Mary Thomas from Sprat Hall
1. Johannes Samuel (Bamberg) From Frederiksted
1. Joseph James from Anguilla
1. John Samuel from Anguilla
1. Thomas James from Anguilla [Folio 2b-3a, notice 7]
1. James Griffith from Anguilla
1. Rebecca Frederik from Cane

### **Mention #7 (book 6)**

#### **Saturday the 17th of April 1880**

(...) The detainee **Susanna Abrahamsom, called Bottom Belly**, from plantation Prosperity, born at plantation Golden Rock, states that her age is 44, which seems to correspond with her appearance. She belongs to the congregation of the Episcopal Church. The action is made clear to her, and it is added that she is particularly charged with participation in the excesses in Frederiksted during the afternoon of the 1st of October, cf. the interrogations of the 7th of Decem: 1878 and the 22nd of Novr: 1879 and with participation in plunder and arson in Frederiksted town during the following night, in which there is particular reference to the witness testimony of the 20th of Dec: of last year.

### **Mention #8 (book 6)**

## Saturday the 1st of May 1880

(...) The detainee repeats her previous statement that she did nothing apart from that which she has admitted regarding her circumstances outside the Custom House in the afternoon, and apart from that, she has nothing to add (...)

In the morning, military arrived in town, and the negroes dispersed and spread, but at the outskirts of the town [Folio 27b-28a, notice 32], in the so-called "Free Gut", another attempt to set fire to the town was done a couple of hours later. No one is charged with participation and the excesses during the afternoon unless he is also charged with other participation in the uprising. James Emanuel, Benjamin and John Hodge, who are charged in this matter, are also charged with participation in the crimes committed during the night, and the first mentioned is also charged with plunder and arson at plantations. Amongst those who are charged with the arson in town are detainees George Henry, Francis Harrison, Emanuel Jacob, David Cameron, **Susanna Abrahamson** and Isaac Anthony (...)

## Mention #9 (book 6)

### Friday the 7th of May 1880

(...) one by one, the detainees below appear:

1. James Emanuel Benjamin
1. John Hodge
1. George Henry
1. Francis Harrison
1. Emanuel Jacob
1. **Susanna Abrahamson**
1. Joseph Spencer
1. Hans Christian
1. John Thomas Sobers
1. Christopher Samuel
1. George Callender
1. Henry England
1. William Barnes
1. George Simmons
1. Edward Lewis
1. Joseph Briggs
1. W<sup>m</sup> Henry
1. Christian Martin
1. Wren Gittens
1. George Cambridge
1. James Cox
1. Mary Thomas and [Folio 30b-31a, notice 35]
1. Johannes Samuel (Bamberg)

When each of them are presented with those punishments for which they are noted, they admit that they have been convicted and punished as presented, and they state that they have not been otherwise or differently punished. However, some of them remark that they have been punished for failure to

meet their labour expectations, in which regard the Commission remarks that it has not found cause to seek information on punishments which have been imposed solely on such grounds (...)

## **Mention #10 (book 6)**

### **Saturday the 10th of July 1880**

(...) Both Commission members, Supreme Judge Rosenstand and Counsellor Sarauw were present, and then was performed [Folio 31b-32a, notice 36] the

#### Criminal Case

Supreme Judge Lemming, Counsel for the prosecution  
ctr:

#### Detainees No

1. James Emanuel Benjamin (Mannie) from Mt Pleasant
2. John Hodge from Fredensborg
3. George Henry from Sprat Hall
4. Francis Harrison from Prosperity
5. Emanuel Jacob from Prosperity
6. David Cameron from La Grange
7. Susanna Abrahamson (Bottom Belly) from Prosperity
8. Isaac Anthony from Frederiksted
9. Axelina E. Solomon (Agnes) from Bethlehem
10. Mathilda Mc Bean from Pl: Cane
11. Joseph Bowell from Høgensborg
12. Joseph Spencer from Høgensborg
13. Hans Christian from Williams Delight
14. John Thomas Sobers from Becks Grove
15. Christopher Samuel from Mt Pleasant (Plessens)
16. George Michael from Envy
17. Thomas Critchlow from Pl: Jealousy
18. William James from Grove Place
19. George Callender from Enf: Green
20. Henry England from Jealousy
21. William Arnold from Upper Love
22. William Barnes from Rust up Twist
23. George Simmons from Barren Spot
  1. Richard Gibbs (Seeley) from Barren Spot
  1. Edward Lewis from Mt Pleasant
  1. Henry Barker from Høgensborg
  1. Joseph Briggs from Fredensborg
  1. William Henry from Lower Love
  1. Christian Martin from Lower Love
  1. Wren Gittens from Lower Love
  1. George Cambridge from Upper Love
  1. James Cox from Diamond

1. Joseph Williams from Windsor
1. Mary Thomas from Sprat Hall
1. Johannes Samuel (Bamberg) from Frederiksted
1. Joseph James from Enfield Green
1. John Samuel from Anguilla
1. Thomas James from Anguilla
1. James Griffith from Anguilla and also
1. the charged Rebecca Frederik from Cane

All the accused are presented unchained.

Counsel for the prosecution Supreme Judge Lemming attends and brings the case before the court by presenting the subpoena, whereafter he presents the action order and the interrogation inquiry along with the accounts, whereafter he presents a document from yesterday to which he refers.

The detainees are informed of the content of the accounts of the detainees' claims and they are, individually, encouraged to add whatever they consider to be relevant in this regard, but none of them have anything to add to what they have stated during the course of the inquiry and after the action is made clear to them.