

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A SLAVE TRIAL IN COLONIAL NATCHITOCHEs

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with introduction by Mathé Allain

INTRODUCTION

The Papeles Procedentes de Cuba contain a most interesting, lengthy transcript of a slave trial held in Natchitoches from March 20 to March 24, 1770.* Covering thirty-two double pages in a tightly written but beautifully legible script, the transcript reveals a great deal about legal procedures as well as the day-to-day lives of slaves on the Natchitoches frontier.

When Athanase de Mézières became commandant of Natchitoches, on November 24, 1769, he took immediate steps to remedy a series of civil disorders which he had the occasion to observe during his thirty-odd years of residence at the post. A native of Paris, De Mézières had been in Natchitoches since at least 1743.¹ An officer in the infantry, he had reached the rank of captain when he was discharged from the French service on September 15, 1763. He entered the Spanish service in 1769 and in recognition of his skill with the Indians, was appointed commandant.²

On January 21, 1770, he issued a series of police ordinances. The first four of which concerned the sale of alcoholic beverages, illegal trade with the Indians, the ingratitude and rebellion of children, and the branding of cattle. The fifth ordinance was directed at the "uncontrolled behavior" of the Natchitoches blacks, and, as well, at the laxity of their masters. It forbade slaves to assemble for balls, day or night, with violins or drums, or for any other purposes, under penalty of the whip and a twenty *livres* fine for the master. Blacks wandering without permission were to be arrested by slave patrols, imprisoned and whipped, the master having to pay the jail

*Spain. Archivo General de Indias, *Papeles procedentes de Cuba*, legajo 188-A.

¹Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1914), I, 80.

²*Ibid.*, 81.

fees and the knouter's salary. Slaves carrying either heavy sticks, knives, or firearms, would be put in a *carcan* and whipped, weapons and horses to be sold for the benefit of the church. Slaves were forbidden to own knives or firearms or horses, to work for themselves, or to form associations based on their place of origin, under pain of the *carcan* and the whip. Those who sold any item without permission would be whipped, and the master would incur a fine four times the value of the object. Finally, black women guilty of prostitution would be exposed and whipped, and white men who participated would be punished to the full extent of the law.³

On February 1, De Mézières forwarded his ordinances to Governor Luis de Unzaga explaining that the Natchitoches slaves had dared organize in various bands, some calling themselves the "Creoles"; others, "the Africans," with a mulatto slave as leader, hence in the ordinance the reference to associations based on origin. He feared evil designs on their part and therefore took steps to prevent their dangerous nocturnal wanderings.⁴ The governor approved De Mézières' measures on March 16,⁵ and, indeed, they were soon justified by events. On March 22, De Mézières notified Unzaga that on the preceding Sunday someone had taken a shot at his overseer, that he was taking steps to find the author of this dastardly treachery, that he had the slave "Cristobal" in irons. Now busily engaged in pursuing the matter, he promised the governor to employ due diligence and zeal.⁶

Diligence and zeal are indeed evidenced in the detailed transcript which has survived. The facts of the case are simple enough. De Mézières had recently hired a certain Noël Verret⁷ as overseer. Determined to establish order and efficiency, Verret treated the slaves quite harshly, beating them frequently and severely. The day before the incident, he had beat a certain Christophe whom he accused of sawing wood badly. At the first blows Christophe screamed, then became quiet, a silence Noël Verret interpreted as evidence of anger. Afterwards the slave resumed his work, now doing it

³PPC, 188-A

⁴PPC, 110.84.

⁵PPC, 110.85.

⁶PPC, 110.111.

⁷Noël Verret was the son of Joseph Verret and Marie-Eve LaBranche. In 1747, when his mother remarried, he was seven years old. (Alice Daly Forsyth, *Louisiana Marriage Contracts*, Vol. I [New Orleans, 1980], p. 184.) His older brothers, Joseph, Michel and André, and the younger ones, Francois and Jean-Baptiste, appear in the St. John the Baptist records. André was married to Marie-Adélaïde-Victoire Pain, the daughter of Daniel Pain, the Natchitoches planter mentioned in the slave trial transcript and dealt repeatedly with both Pain and Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet, (Glenn R. Conrad, *Saint-Jean Baptiste des Allemands* [Lafayette, 1972], p. 73.)

to the overseer's satisfaction. Christophe was considered to be a troublemaker, having run away previously for two weeks. He had been pardoned when he returned, primarily because of the pleas of the missionary who had sheltered him.

The day after the beating was a Sunday. Noël Verret went to spend the day with Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet, a near-by planter.⁸ He returned around nine o'clock, in the dark, at which time he was fired upon. Feeling the bullet pass his ear, he called out, "Rascal, if I had my gun, I would find you, wherever you are hiding." He caught sight of his assailant, then afraid of another attack, fled back to Charbonnet's house. Charbonnet's slave driver Cupidon was dispatched to the De Mézières plantation to take a roll call. When he returned, with Mercure, De Meziere's slave driver, he reported that all the blacks were accounted for. But convinced that Christophe must be the culprit, though the two drivers had found him asleep, Verret sent Cupidon and Mercure to arrest the suspect who was kept in irons at the Charbonnet house for the rest of the night, then sent to the post the next day.

De Mézières wasted no time in instituting proceedings. Gathering his officers, Captain Louis Bormé,⁹ Lieutenant Rémy Poisot,¹⁰ Sub-Lieutenant Pierre Dupin,¹¹ and young Pierre Lacoste as clerk,¹² he summoned principals and witnesses. He first took the deposition of Noël Verret and Charbonnet, then heard eighteen slaves, and finally Christophe himself. The questioning was painstaking. The attitude adopted toward the Negroes was threatening: anyone withholding evidence would eventually be found

⁸Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet, a native of Thiers in Auvergne had married, on March 14, 1768, Marie-Pélagie Pain, daughter of Daniel Pain. (Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches 1729-1803* [New Orleans, 1977], p. 122.) His brother, Antoine was also established at Natchitoches. Charbonnet ran a modest plantation, the 1766 Spanish Census lists the brothers as owning only four slaves. (Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials: Censuses, Military Rolls, and Tax Lists, 1722-1803* [Chicago, 1981], p. 16.)

⁹Jean-Louis-César Bormé, dit Provençal, born at Pignans in Provence on March 10, 1721, had risen rapidly through the ranks. A soldier in 1750, he was a captain in 1762. In 1779, he succeeded De Mézières as commandant (Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 329) and died at Natchitoches on January 28, 1787. (Mills, *Natchitoches*, p. 162)

¹⁰Rémy Poisot, dit Bourguignon, was the son of a royal notary of Strassbourg. On May 4, 1737, he had married Anne-Marie Philippe, the widow of Jacques Dupuis, (Mills, *Natchitoches*, p. 20). Pleading age and ill health, in 1774 he asked for a discharge which was granted on August 8. (Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 104, 109). The 1766 Spanish census lists him as owning seventeen slaves (Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 15)

¹¹Pierre-Manuel-Victor Dupin, a native of Paris, had been listed in 1766 as ensign and aide-mayor and as owning two slaves. (Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, p. 15). In 1774 he succeeded Poisot as lieutenant. (Bolton, *Athanase de Mézières*, II, 110).

¹²Pierre Lacoste is given as twenty-two years old on the 1772 militia roll; a notation by his name indicates that he was dead. (Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, 27, 30).

out and would share the culprit's fate, and every witness was treated as if he were withholding evidence. Yet, the slaves held their ground. They denied any knowledge of the attempted murder and supported Christophe's alibi—sick and feverish from the beating, he was in bed asleep in the cabin he shared with Cotty, Jean-Pierre, and Jean-Pierre's wife, Collette. Their demeanor, natural and unafraid, convinced the four officers who dismissed the case against them and ordered Christophe freed. They castigated Noël Verret for harboring frivolous suspicions disparaging to a planter as respectable as De Mézières. The most severely admonished was Charbonnet who, by his own testimony, was guilty of negligence and lackadaisical observance of the January ordinances.

The matter did not rest there, for the accusations against De Mézières' slave, the trial, and the sentence were part of a power struggle involving the newly appointed commandant and the post subdelegate, Daniel Pain, Jean Barthélémy Charbonnet's father-in-law. Pain may have resented De Mézières' appointment—after all as subdelegate he had been second-in-command to the commandant De la Perrier and might justifiably have expected to succeed him. As a planter, he rivaled De Mézières: the 1766 French census lists him as owning twenty-one black slaves and five Indians; his crop amounted to 6,000 twists of tobacco, second only to De Mézières' 10,000.¹³ As a trader, Pain may also have resented De Mézières' zeal for curbing illegal trade with the Indians.

At the time of the attempted murder and subsequent trial, Pain was probably absent from the post: on February 20, 1770, getting ready to leave for France, he had given full power of attorney to Mathieu Montineau.¹⁴ That may be why Charbonnet did not protest the judgment for awhile. But on August 21, De Mézières reported to Governor Unzaga that Charbonnet was appealing the sentence to the Superior Tribunal. The commandant strongly suspected that the attempt against Verret had been planned on Charbonnet's plantation and that the latter tried to cast suspicion on De Mézières' slaves by "whim or malevolence," thus being guilty of "frivolity, unconcern, and insubordination."

On October 16, with De Mézières away to negotiate a treaty with the Cadodacho,¹⁵ Charbonnet petitioned Bormé, acting commandant in the

¹³Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴"Index to the Spanish Judicial Records of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, VI (1926), p. 313.

¹⁵De Mézières wrote a report on the expedition on October 29, 1770. (Bolton, *Athanasie de Mézières*, I, 206.

interim.¹⁶ The sentence against him having been posted in prominent places at the post, he could no longer remain there honorably. Therefore, he requested permission to leave by land, his wife and slaves to follow by river. Bormé having authorized his departure, Charbonnet left for New Orleans. Then, on November 3, all hell broke loose. De Mézières, back from his trip, was confronted not only with Charbonnet's departure but with a request from the latter's wife, Pélégie Pain, asking leave to join her husband, as was her womanly duty. De Mézières refused curtly, scribbling his refusal in the margin of her petition.

Charbonnet's departure was not the only thing which had taken place in his absence. On the same day, November 3, Daniel Pain wrote Unzaga reminding him that because of ill-health he, Pain, had long ago requested permission to leave Natchitoches to go settle on the German Coast. His request had been refused, but he continued to look for a buyer for his Cane River holdings. Having found one, in the person of De la Chaise de St. Denis, *alcade* of New Orleans, he hurried to have the sale passed before Bormé, acting commandant. De Mézières on his return had refused him permission to leave and had forbidden him, in any angry letter, to send his wife and his children as well as his female slaves and their children to New Orleans. Pain acknowledged that he had violated the rules which required sales to be posted and advertised, but pleaded ignorance.

De Mézières was fuming. Not only had Charbonnet and Pain taken advantage of his absence to manipulate departures which would deprive the post of valuable settlers, but he felt his second-in-command had deliberately betrayed him. He therefore arrested the captain in the king's name. Bormé dashed off a lengthy memoir, penned in uncertain Spanish (the French version, displays an equally shaky control of spelling!). He complained De Mézières' "cruel manners" which antagonized the settlers, denounced the commandant for making him delay a trading trip, and finally gave his version of the Charbonnet departure. He had seen nothing wrong in letting Charbonnet depart, for the latter, "a respectable man" who had seen his reputation besmirched by the "defamatory sentence" posted on "public walls" by De Mézières wanted to appeal the judgment in New Orleans. As for Pain, Bormé acknowledged having witnessed the sale, but again saw no wrong in doing so.

De Mézières forwarded the entire correspondence to Unzaga, with his own comments, quoting the governor's own instructions as justification for his refusal to allow settlers to move without official passports. He also

¹⁶The petitions, letters, and memoirs are to be found in legajo 188-A-C, arranged in a rough chronological order.

offered justification for his displeasure with Pain's property sale, and for his reprimand of the subdelegate's careless handling of the post archives.

Obviously, De Mézières had erred in tackling as prominent a man as Daniel Pain or his relatives. On November 19, Unzaga curtly ordered the commandant to allow Mme Charbonnet to join her husband, chiding De Mézières for having detained her on frivolous grounds, among others, that her husband had obligated himself to contribute to a church and had not fulfilled his promise. Why should Charbonnet share in the building of a church he did not plan to use, asked the governor. It was the right of subjects to move about as they pleased, he maintained, a view, nevertheless, in total opposition to colonial practices.

As for Pain, Unzaga approved the sale of his estate and his departure from Natchitoches.¹⁷ He ratified Bormé's authorization and ordered De Mézières to stop persecuting the "poor Captain." He sternly admonished the commandant to stop disturbing the civil peace. The same day the governor wrote Pain informing him he had eight days to settle his affairs in Natchitoches and leave. Unzaga also assured Bormé that De Mézières had been ordered to indemnify his second-in-commandant for the trade losses incurred through the commandant's dilatory tactics.

Thus the trial of the slave Christophe, resulting from the assassination attempt on Noël Verret, was the tip of an iceberg, the official manifestation of a power struggle between the commandant and the subdelegate. De Mézières won the first round, in Natchitoches, clearing his slave and condemning Charbonnet as a slovenly plantation manager. But he lost resoundingly in the second round, not only receiving no support in his attempt to enforce existing regulations, but suffering a stinging rebuke from the governor.

The Pain-De Mézières rivalry may explain in part the painstaking care exercised in questioning the slaves, for De Mézières must have been equally eager to clear his plantation and to prove Charbonnet wrong. Nevertheless, the 1770 Natchitoches slave trial exhibits a striking concern with justice and fairness in establishing a slave's innocence or guilt. It seems therefore worthwhile to reproduce it in its entirety, though the meticulous nature of the proceedings necessarily renders the transcript repetitious and monotonous.

¹⁷Pain and Charbonnet settled in St. John the Baptist Parish.

TRANSLATION

Today, March 20, 1770, at the Government headquarters of the Natchitoches Post, in the presence of Mr. de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge of this Post, and its territories, Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, are present to serve as assistants and begin the preliminary investigation of a certain Christophe, negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. Mr. Noël Verret suspects Christophe of plotting to assassinate him. Verret first reported his suspicion to Mr. de Mézières in the following undated letter transcribed here word for word.

Sir:

I have the honor of writing you to assure you of my esteem and my appreciation for your kindness and also to inform you that yesterday at nine o'clock in the evening, as I was returning from Pain's house,¹ a scoundrel took a shot at me between the two lakes next to the road. Fortunately, I was not hit. I secured Christophe who comes immediately to mind. I am not looking further, for I hope you will come here to do so. I have the honor of thanking Madame for remembering me and I assure her, as well as you, Sir, that I am your very humble and obedient servant.

Signed

Verret

P.S. Please extend to your sons for me the best wishes for success and good health.

The original is at the Office of the Clerk of Court of this Post.

Signed

Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, the undersigned, Captain of the Infantry, etc., certify and attest that as a consequence of the above letter from Mr. Verret brought to me yesterday at nine o'clock in the morning, or thereabout, by a certain Mercure, a negro slave driver from my plantation, I returned there immediately to find the negroes busy at their daily tasks. Upon reaching the house, I saw Mr. Verret who was returning from Mr. Pain's house where the negro Christophe had been detained in irons since the preceding day. I had Mercure place handcuffs on Christophe, then ordered all male negroes on the plantation to embark with the negro prisoner, which I did along with Mr. Dupin, the militia officer who had accompanied me. Messrs. Verret and Charbonnet, Sr., along with Cupidon and Jacob, negro slaves belonging to Mr. Pain, reached the Post between seven and eight o'clock in the evening. I had the negro

¹Daniel Pain, the warehouse keeper and subdelegate of the post who does not figure in the transcript but played a major role in the background of the trial, was a native of des Epaux, near Marsac. He married Jeanne Roujot on March 5, 1748 (Forsyth, *Louisiana Marriage Contracts*, 199). He fathered numerous children, who allowed him to become allied to important Creole families. A major planter, he is listed in the 1766 Spanish census as owning twenty-one slaves (Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, p. 15). After 1771, he and his eldest son appear frequently in the St. John the Baptist records.

Christophe committed to the king's prison. I signed this testimony along with the aforementioned gentlemen.

Signed

Athanase de Mézières, Dupin, Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet, Bormé, Poisot, Noël Verret, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court

Today, the same date as above, by virtue of the suit herewith presented to Mr. de Mézières by Mr. Verret and dated the nineteenth of this month, the latter was summoned by the Captain of the Infantry, etc.

Q 1 - State your name, the country you come from, and your status.

A - I am Noël Verret, a native of Louisiana and a planter.

Q 2 - How long have you been here, and what is your purpose in coming here? What is your present occupation?

A - I came to this Post last January 10, as a result of my agreement with Mr. de Mézières, with a passport granted me by the Governor, in order to manage Mr. de Mézières' plantation. Consequently, I am engaged in the cultivation of indigo.

Q 3 - Why do you suspect Christophe rather than some other negro on the plantation?

A - Among the several negroes on the plantation whom I had punished for various infractions, Christophe was the last one, and for this reason I suspect him of having fired at me the very next day. Thus, twenty-eight hours elapsed between his punishment and the shooting. Christophe testified, as I learned from Mr. de Mézières, that he greatly feared me.

Q 4 - How did you punish Christophe and for what transgressions? Besides the punishment, did you detect any evidence of anger in either his gestures or his words? Earlier, through someone else, or through Christophe himself, was any hatred indicated?

A - I beat him with a stick to teach him to saw wood since he spent the day without learning. At the first blows Christophe screamed loudly; after more blows, he became quiet. This appeared to be evidence of anger, but he made no gesture and uttered no word. Prior to this, no one indicated that he had expressed sentiments of hatred or vengeance.

Q 5 - Did Christophe return to work when the punishment was over and did he make any effort to do a better job? Who was the negro who worked with him? Were there any other witnesses nearby? What was their attitude at this time? Did they show emotion? Did you see them talking afterward? What seemed to you to result from these conversations?

A - Christophe returned to work immediately after his punishment. He did his work properly. The negro Valentin, a capable worker, operated the saw with him on one end, and with the other negroes, Jacob and Cotty, on the other end. During their work Valentin noticed no muttering and thought they were afraid Christophe would leave afterward. He did not go to another work site for the remainder of that Saturday even though it was already late.

Q 6 - Did the punishment cause any bruises on Christophe's body? After the beating did he walk normally or with difficulty? Were the blows violent enough for a black (through experience, you know these people well enough to know how far they might go in such situations) to nurse as horrible a plan as assassinating the white man who inflicted the punishment?

A - Christophe developed some swelling in one hand because he used it to ward off the blows to his shoulders. He walked normally. I know that negroes

have a bad attitude and that when things do not go their way, they resort to outlandish things. For example, the deceased Mr. l'Ange from the Côte des Allemands was beaten and wounded by a gunshot fired, he suspected, by one of his negroes who was never brought to justice. The case was never proved. Moreover, a man named Marcantère, a resident of Pointe Coupée, was attacked with a knife by one of his negroes, whom he had to stab in self-defense.² Finally, the witnesses's own brothers, who ran Mrs. Macarty's plantation, were attacked by one of her negroes, but without fatal consequences.

Q 7 - During the night following the punishment, did you hear any people or dogs on your side of the river or on the other side where the negro quarters are located? The next day, Sunday, was there any activity on their part? Why did Escapin beg permission to come to Natchitoches? Did you see him leave and return? Did Escapin or someone else give you a letter from Mr. de Mézières along with some possessions, and at what time did Escapin arrive?

A - A big dog barked as usual much of the night around the oven. The next day I noticed nothing. Escapin had asked me shortly after noon and after Christophe's punishment for permission to go see his wife who is a servant of Mr. de Mézières. Normally I do not approve of these outings because it is harvest time. We are short of time; the negro wretches are lazy; they have needs which they can satisfy only by stealing. Nonetheless, I allowed Escapin to go after work Saturday evening provided he return Sunday morning. He did not return until late, about seven o'clock in the evening. He gave me a letter and some belongings sent by Mr. de Mézières. I told him to give them to Colette, my negro servant.

Q 8 - Who are the negroes you talked about in your third response whom you punished for various transgressions? Concerning Christophe, what answers did you have to the fourth question?

A - The first ones I punished were Valentin and Jacob; then Joseph, then Diogène, and finally Christophe. All were beaten with a stick for not performing their duties as they should, and none gave any indication that he sought revenge either before or after, nor was there any evidence of resentment. Those people know well what they conceal. I had to use a stick because the slave driver was absent, being busy with other chores across the river.

Q 9 - Since you have been living on this plantation, have you seen some Indians? Have you perhaps had some dealings or discussions with them? Have you seen some unfamiliar negroes whom you might have sent away, threatened, or punished? Or have you had heated words with some Spaniard or other white man? Do you know of anyone who might bear a grudge toward you for any reason?

A - Since Christophe's escape and return, I saw a pirogue filled with Indians stop at the latter's hut. They got out and began to shuck corn with the negroes, with whom they got along well. Another Indian named Miguel came to tell me that there was a great deal of game at the lake and that he would bring me some

²The only Lange to appear in the St. John and St. Charles records is Joseph Lange, a free negro and his son Charles-Joseph. (Conrad, *St. Jean-Baptiste*, 51, 78. They were slave owners (*Ibid.*, 114, 128, 144, 178) and owned property in both St. John and St. Charles. The "Mercantre" of Pointe Coupée may be François Marcantel, a Pointe Coupée settler who married Ann Roudot in 1754, then Marie-Joseph Richaume in 1765.

in exchange for some ammunition. I gave him some, and having received only a turkey, I complained about how little that was. The Indian apologized and asked for additional advances of lead and gunpowder. I only furnished him with lead this time in order to try to extract payment. Miguel went away and I never saw him again. This happened five or six days ago. I had seen some unfamiliar negroes at Mr. Pain's house, but I did not speak to them. I have had nothing to do with Spaniards, except to give them vegetables on Mr. de Mézières' behalf. I do not understand them, and I have had no problems with any of them here or elsewhere.

Q 10 - Why did Christophe escape, and what was the reason for his reprieve after fifteen days of absence? Upon his return did he seem disobedient, etc.?

A - I attributed it to the numerous occasions I threatened him with punishment for his negligence in taking care of the oxen. He had come to accompany Mr. de Mézières from the plantation to the Post and was sent back. That was early in the morning but he returned only that evening. Mr. de Mézières told me in the presence of a negro boy to find out the cause of this delay. I answered that I would do so at noon. At the time I had Christophe take me across the river and ordered him to follow me to the quarters. Christophe disappeared and did not return for fifteen days. Mr. de Mézières could not refuse (as it is often the case on this Post) the pleas of the Reverend Father of the Adaes, to whose mission the wretch had fled, and those of the commandant of the region. Thus Christophe obtained his pardon. When he reappeared on the plantation, he laughed and seemed to show off before the other negroes, no doubt because of the impunity he had enjoyed gave him a feeling of security.

Q 11 - Is Christophe particularly liked and admired by the other negroes? Is he one of those, so common on plantations, who influence their companions, or on the contrary, do you know if he is but little liked or even hated or scorned?

A - I have not resided here long enough to establish the necessary rapport with the negroes on the plantation, but Christophe seems to me to exercise much influence. I think, however, that Mercure, the slave driver, Jean-Baptiste, and Otis are the ones who prevail over their companions and over the outsiders because of their talent and their position. Christophe appears to me indifferent; but when it comes to theft, escape, return, and punishment, Christophe knows a great deal and incidents like these create in a negroes' mind a bond and an interest for the vilest and most abject.

Q 12 - In the course of your administration of the plantation, have you seen or read that the negro Christophe had incited or fomented quarrels, threatened anyone with a gun, knife or stick? Has he maintained any contact on the outside? Does he prepare food himself? In which hut does he eat his meals and sleep? Is he, or are some other negroes from the quarters, in the habit of using firearms? Since the interdiction was made and publicized, were any gunshots fired?

A - I neither noticed nor witnessed disputes between Christophe and anyone else. Pierre, Mr. Pain's mulatto, boasted that he was with Christophe's wife and warded off a hatchet blow which came as a result of jealousy. He then tied up Christophe outside where the mosquitoes were plentiful. Christophe denied this to me. I know of no other story. I learned indirectly that during Christophe's escape, Joseph, a negro belonging to Mr. Dupin, the militia officer, gave him oil, flour, gunpowder, and bullets. I then assumed that he had a firearm, or knew

where to find one. Before his escape he ate and slept alone. Since then he has been taking his meals and sleeping at Cotty's house along with the others in the hut. I have not seen him with a gun. I heard shots only from one named Cadet, from the Indian-slave hunters, and from Mr. de Mézières' cowhands who have been away for nine days making a new cowshed at a place separated from the plantation by two leagues of swamps. Mr. de Mézières, as customary, has authorized the Indians to carry such weapons.

Q 13 - Did you make a thorough search of all the negro huts under your command for knives and firearms? Did you obey the order given by Mr. de Mézières on January 21, 1770, published and posted on the same day and stating that it is forbidden (article four) for the negroes to own side arms or firearms? How many weapons did you find? To whom did they belong? For what purpose were they used? Were the guns loaded? Were the knives sharp? Were these in full view or hidden? Did the owners react in any way when they were taken away from them? During the second visit yesterday, did you find more arms or gunpowder and bullets? If so, at whose house? Did you detect any emotion during your search? Did you find the negroes as submissive as you expected? Finally, were you fully satisfied with the searches, or did you suspect that the negroes had concealed some weapons in violation of the orders and the laws? On what did you base this suspicion? On whose statement? When was this statement given? Was it before or after the gunshot was fired? If it was before, why did you not verify it with your very eyes and punish the offenders? If it was after, who are the accused and are you suspicious of the latter?

A - The first search, made immediately after the ordinance, was carried out with the help of Mercure, the slave driver. I remained outside, near the huts which I recognized as a mistake. Mercure gave me three guns, one belonging to himself, another to Jean-Baptiste, and the third to Otis. I do not know what purpose they served. Upon confiscating them, I told the slaves that when they needed them to hunt crows or bears, I would lend them the guns. I think that two of the guns currently in my possession are loaded. They were probably in their rooms. Not having ascertained this, I recognize as another shortcoming of mine. These negroes in particular, and the others in general, showed no displeasure at all. The second search ordered by Mr. de Mézières, I carried out personally yesterday, the nineteenth of this month, along with Messrs. Dupin, the militia officer, and Charbonnet. I saw no arms but found some gunpowder in a glass vial and some in a medium-sized horn, some lead and bullets in a small horn in the hut of Mercure the slave driver who insisted they belonged to an Indian hunter and cowhand named Hector, and that a little negro named Michel had placed them in a crate. Mercure and the others consented readily to the visit. It is difficult to know the feeling of this race of men. I was fully satisfied after searching the beds, the attics, the rooms, the sheds, the storehouses, the chicken houses, the chests, and every other place possible. I think previously some weapons were concealed that the eldest of Mr. de Mézières' sons brought me. Otis owned a large copper-coated gun that he had obtained from Joseph Lassonde³, the mulatto. I learned of this incident after my first visit. Because it

³Joseph Lassonde, or La Sonde was a free mulatto from Opelousas (Jacqueline O. Vidrine, *The Opelousas Post, 1764-1789: Guide to the St. Landry Parish Archives* (Baton Rouge, 1979), p. 49.

was before the gunshot fired at me, I did not deem it fitting to verify at once because I was sure that the gun was hidden. I thought that if I allowed some time to elapse, the negroes would feel secure again and I could more easily catch them by surprise, with the hidden weapons back in their houses. Furthermore, I feel no distrust toward Otis.

Q 14 - Do you go frequently to visit your neighbor, Mr. Charbonnet? At what time do you go there? At what time do you return? Have you ever had encounters, especially at night, which gave you cause for alarm? Do you ever have company when you return? Are the negroes aware of your visits? Are you the only one to occupy, at night, a dwelling as large as that of Mr. de Mézières? You seem to know well the negroes' disposition and to be aware you might meet with attack in so vast a solitude, distant from human assistance, accessible by the single path between a lake and a river. Why then did you not take precautions to protect yourself and the reputation of a plantation now discredited by a heinous crime, the like of which had been unknown until now on this Post?

A - On Sundays and holidays for the most part, I go to Mr. Charbonnet's house to spend the day. The other days I go there rather frequently after supper to spend the evening. I return an hour and a half or so later. Once when Mr. de Mézières still lived on the plantation, I encountered a certain Juan Marie, an Indian or Spanish half-breed, who had a horse tied in the woods which he rode to the Post at early dawn. I always go and return alone. I do so knowingly, and the negroes are aware of these visits. I have good reasons for that behavior. Since I moved my family to Fort Natchitoches where they now reside, I have been alone in Mr. de Mézières' house. I feel I cannot afford to show any fear, even if it means going unnamed, in order to impress the negroes who are afraid only in so far as one shows no fear. As for discredit to the plantation, I hope to rehabilitate its reputation. Nothing can make me waver in my determination to arouse in them such submission, that if this event is not condemned to oblivion, at least it will not be repeated.

Q 15 - State the circumstances of the assassination plot of which you complain, and for which you demand justice in the suit announced at the beginning of this cross-examination, namely: "To Mr. de Mézières, Lieutenant of the Governor and Judge of the Natchitoches Post. I, Noël Verret, responsible for the management of Mr. de Mézières' plantation, wish to state that yesterday at approximately nine o'clock in the evening, coming from Mr. Pain's plantation where I had dined I was attacked by an unknown person with a gun between the two lakes that divide the aforementioned plantation, I was attacked by an unknown person with a gun. That person fired upon me, and considering that I have no known enemies aside from a few negroes from the plantation I manage whom I punished for various infractions, I suspect principally a certain Christophe whom I had beaten the day before. I beg you, Sir, to make a thorough inquiry to verify this assassination attempt and to order, Sir, whatever your sense of fairness and justice will dictate.

Signed,
Verret

Natchitoches Post, March 19, 1770

The original of this petition has been left with the Clerk of Court of this Post by Mr. de Mézières.

A - In my petition I state that the circumstances or details are limited to the fact that a gunshot had been fired. I received some grains of powder in my clothes, and one in the face. I felt a stream of air past my left ear. This stream I believed to be caused by a bullet, for I developed a sort of deafness until the following day. My attention was drawn to the origin of the shot. The fire was out of the ordinary and the noise louder than normal. I remained motionless five or six seconds, waiting for my attacker to come forward, but that did not happen. I then said, "Rascal, if I had my shotgun, I would find you wherever you are hiding." At these words I saw someone who seemed to take three steps. Afraid that knowing I did not have a firearm, the attacker might be encouraged to stab me, I fled as fast as I could. I called out repeatedly after I was about half an arpent from there, "Help, I am being murdered," until I was opposite Mr. Charbonnet's quarters. I saw a figure and asked, "Who are you?" "I am Cupidon," he answered. "Follow me," I said. I reached Mr. Charbonnet's house, walking along buildings until the spot where Mr. Charbonnet and young Mr. Pain, his brother-in-law, came toward me. They had already seen Cupidon who had told them about hearing the gunshot and described my flight and cries.

Q 16 - Did you think then that Christophe was the author of the crime? What search did you conduct to ascertain the facts? Did you send someone, or did you go yourself, to call the roll in the negro quarters? Whom did you send to do this? If they were blacks, why did you utilize them for so delicate a task? How many conveyances were available at the plantation to cross the river? What kinds? Which ones belonged to Mr. Charbonnet? Were the latter's quarters searched? Did you not find it strange that Cupidon should be there, alone and alert, while others, who were also near the place the shot had been fired, could know as much about it? Did other of Mr. Charbonnet's negroes come afterward to see and hear you? What was their reaction? What was the result of the search made at Mr. de Mézières' quarters? Was Christophe there, and in what condition? What was done after this roll call? Was the negro Christophe summoned in your presence? By whom? In what mood did he appear to be? How was he taken away, freely or forcibly? What was done to him and what did he reply to the questions that were asked? Did he waver or did he contradict himself in his answers? How did he spend the night? Did he sleep or not? What was the first thing you did the next day? Did you notice footprints at the scene of the crime? Did you measure them? Did you compare them with the prisoner's? Did you find the pirogues in their usual places? Was each negro at his task? Did they appear concerned and suspicious? Did they work as much as usual? Was the negro woman Colette at her usual place, at Mr. Charbonnet's house? What did Christophe say, when on his master's orders, he was handcuffed, did he appear troubled, or did he express regret at having been caught?

A - I thought only of Christophe since he was the last I had beaten. I realized later that he was not the only one to have been beaten and scolded and that a conspiracy might have developed. Mr. Charbonnet immediately sent Cupidon, his slave driver, to search Mr. de Mézières' quarters. Cupidon crossed the river for this purpose right away in the only one of his master's boats available. The other was unwieldy because of its size and the swiftness of the waters. Cupidon was assigned the task without thinking. I was too afraid and Mr. Charbonnet too surprised. There were only two boats at Mr. de Mézières'. No one checked to see if they had been moved. Mr. Charbonnet's negro quarters had not been searched. I attributed Cupidon's quick appearance to his zeal and his vigilance,

remembering Mr. Charbonnet said much good of him. After a rather brief absence, Cupidon returned to report on the roll call. He affirmed hearing Christophe who was asleep, or at least seemed to be. The slave driver Mercure who came back with Cupidon was also asleep when the latter arrived. I suspect complicity among Christophe, Pierre, and Otis, and also Jacob, Mr. Pain's slave who was in Mr. de Mézières' quarters that night with permission in order to treat a certain Joseph who had a hernia. It is astonishing that the slave driver, who heard gunshots and cries, did not become suspicious. I immediately ordered Mercure to watch Christophe, telling him I held him responsible. He discharged his duty, taking Jean-Baptiste and Otis along. Christophe was not tied up on the way or as they crossed the river. His pulse was rapid; Mercure stated that it was because Christophe had been running a fever all day. When asked why he committed his crime, Christophe replied that he had not, that he had a soul to save, and other such trifles. Jean-Baptiste, who was to guard Christophe during the night, released the bonds that tied his arms behind his back and hindered him greatly. He left him with his feet in irons before a bright fire. The next day at dawn, I went with Mr. Charbonnet to the place where the shot had been fired. We both noticed prints which we thought to have been left by the barefooted assassin. We took three measurements from different angles. Those measurements I have not yet compared with Christophe's feet, nor have I determined which foot left what print. They pointed in the direction of Mr. Charbonnet's house toward which my attacker ran, probably because he was pursued. These footprints came back for a short distance and merged with others left by the negroes who worked in the area the day before. The only two pirogues already mentioned were in their usual places. The negroes were working, quietly and peacefully, except for Escapin who seemed so frightened that had I not already suspected another, I would have believed him the culprit. I kept a grim silence, looked away from the negroes, and, by my expression tried to convey lively feelings of indignation and anger. The negroes appeared to work as usual. The woman Colette was at the house, undisturbed and busy. Upon returning to Mr. Charbonnet's, I detected no change in Christophe's behavior. He kept proclaiming his innocence. I was not present when the handcuffs were put on him, nor do I know if, between his detentions and his journey to the Post, he expressed regret over his capture.

Q 17 - Are you satisfied with the questions that were asked of you? Do you have any further comments that might clarify facts or be of interest to you and the general public, considering how important it is to identify the scoundrels and purge society of them?

A - Mercure the slave driver spent more time arresting Christophe than had been necessary in making the general roll call of the eleven huts that compose the quarters. I suspect, along with Mr. Charbonnet, that some agreement existed between Mercure and Christophe and that they used this extra time formulating a strategy about questions they might be asked, so that their answers might agree and they would stand firm in any event. I am satisfied and I have nothing to add.

The cross-examination and his answers have been read to him, he took an oath upon his soul and his conscience that they contained the truth. Requested to sign, he did so along with us, Athanase de Mézières, Infantry Company, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge, and the militia officers, our assistants.

Signed,

Noël Verret, Athanase de Mézières, Rémy Poisot, Louis Bormé, Pierre Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 21, 1770, I, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor and Judge of this Post, have summoned Mr. Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet, resident. Requested to tell the truth, he took an oath on his soul and conscience to do so.

Q 1 - State your name, age, the country you are from and your occupation.

A - I am Jean-Barthélémy Charbonnet. I am thirty-nine years of age, a native of Thiers in Auvergne, France, and I am a planter.

Q 2 - Do you know Mr. Verret? Are you neighbors? Do you see each other frequently, and what days and times of day are you particularly in contact with each other?

A - I have known him since we came to this Post together in my boat. Our relationship has grown closer since we became neighbors, my plantation being about twenty-five arpents from his. We see each other mostly on Sundays and holidays, sometimes during the week. Our meetings are not pre-arranged, and often Mr. Verret stays until late at night.

Q 3 - Has your relationship with Mr. Verret enabled you to observe his manners, thoughts, likes and dislikes? Do you know him to be kind, peaceful, truthful and a man of integrity, or on the other hand do you think he is hard, inhuman, disloyal and capable of deviating from the principles of honor?

A - If I did not regard him as a person of irreproachable character, outstanding judgment and good inclination, I would certainly avoid contact with him. I know him to be a truthful man who is a friend of order, work and duty.

Q 4 - In the course of Mr. Verret's administration of Mr. de Mézières' plantation, have you not learned directly or indirectly that Mr. Verret had punished negroes or had some punished? What was the nature of their offenses? What was the nature of their punishment? Was it consistent with the laws and ordinances? What was the result? Was there grumbling among the negroes? Did Mr. Verret indicate some sort of concern that might foretell the terrible catastrophe that led to these proceedings?

A - Mr. Verret told me he had tied up a negro woman whom he later pardoned, and beaten with a stick a negro sawyer who claimed to be ill. The next day Mr. Verret had him whipped and threatened the slave driver with the same treatment for his slackness in supervising the daily work. He also punished Christophe the day before the incident. I do not know if the negroes showed any resentment, but I never detected any evidence that Mr. Verret distrusted them.

Q 5 - Since he arrived, he enforced strict order and discipline among the negroes, established the new methods, undertook new cultivation, took away the slaves' Saturdays which formerly they had spent tending to their own needs, such as food and chores. Could his dedication cause the negroes, those under his administration as well as outsiders, to plot against him and to regard him as a reformer or as a tyrant?

A - I learned from Mr. Verret that one of his negroes begged for permission to smoke while seated, something they had been allowed to do. Mr. Verret denied this request. He did not indicate if that refusal made them sulky. I do not know the other blacks, but as far as mine are concerned, when I told them upon my last return that I was taking away their Saturdays, they complained to Mrs. Pain, my mother-in-law. I promised fifty lashes to the first who complained and the complaints stopped. Since then everything seemed fine at my place.

Q 6 - In pursuance of Mr. de Mézières' order, issued last January 21, published and posted the same day, an order which forbade blacks (article four) to

own firearms or knives, did you search your quarters thoroughly for weapons? Which negroes owned weapons, and what were they used for?

A - Not knowing the details of the ordinance, I simply ordered my negroes, under penalty of the whip, to show me their weapons. Consequently, they brought me three guns that are now in my room. One belongs to my slave driver, the other to a certain Jean-Baptiste, and the third to a certain Joseph. These were used for hunting. They produced no kind of ammunition. I am virtually certain that they have ammunition and maybe some other weapons, a fact which I intend to verify quickly. I thought it wiser to allow some time to elapse quietly so that those bold enough to hide weapons would become sufficiently reckless to bring them out.

Q 7 - Concerning the assassination plot against Mr. Verret, what can you remember before and after the shot was fired? Did you see Mr. Verret, what was his expression, his frame of mind, his manner of speech? Was he alone? Who was with him at this time? What time could it have been? How was the weather? Was there a gathering at your house? Who were those people? What did they decide? What did they do that very night and the following day? What evidence was there in the footprints, or in the removal of the boats, or in the reactions of the blacks? Were searches begun? Where were they made and why were they intensified?

A - Mr. Verret spent the entire day Sunday the nineteenth of this month at home. After supper about nine o'clock when he left, the sky was starry and the weather was calm. I soon went to bed as did the rest of the family. A quarter of an hour later, more or less, and already asleep, I was awakened by a loud gunshot. My wife told me she heard human cries. I listened closely, as I am hard of hearing, but thought I heard only dogs barking. At once, and unexpectedly, male and female negroes from my plantation came to tell me that Mr. Verret was being murdered. I got up and set out hurriedly. I met my driver near the fence of his house. He told me he had gone to Mr. Verret's help as soon as he heard the shot and had found him unhurt. Mr. Verret showed up shortly afterward and uttered incoherent statements. I ordered my slave driver to go to Mr. de Mézières' quarters to take roll. He did so. A moment later I realized that I should have gone myself. I was ready to do so despite my wife's and mother-in-law's protests, when I realized that I could not because my driver had gone ahead with the only suitable boat. The one that remained was too big and too difficult to handle. Cupidon returned with Mr. de Mézières' slave driver, Mercure, and two others, and reported that no negro had missed roll call. Because Mr. Verret suspected Christophe, I advised him to have Christophe arrested, which he did. The slave was taken to my house, put in irons and tied up. Mrs. Pain observed that the prisoner's thighs were scratched and marked by brambles. Mr. Verret and I verified this. We asked Christophe for the cause, he replied that it happened while he walked through the scrubland toward the house. I pointed out that the paths were virtually without brambles and without thorns. He did not reply to this objection. It never occurred to Mr. Verret and me to suspect my negroes. We did not make a search until the next day at eight in the morning, or thereabouts, when we both went to the scene of the crime. We saw footprints and thought that they belonged to the person who fired at Mr. Verret, missed him, and pursued him. The footprints went toward my plantation, then seemed to track back for some twenty-five or thirty steps, then blended with others. Mr. Verret thought they had been made by negroes who

worked near there. We took measurements of those footprints which appeared to be consistently the same, except for one that was longer - a fact which lead us to believe that the foot slipped in the sand and left a different impression - but with the same width. Some time later, and on orders of Mr. de Mézières who was present, we went along with Mr. Dupin, the militia officer, to search Mr. de Mézières' quarters thoroughly. We found no firearm, but in the slave driver's hut, found a small vial half full of gunpowder, several rounds of buckshot, and some thirty bullets. After the search, everyone went to Natchitoches with Christophe who was placed in the royal prison.

Q 8 - Did you detect the kind of change, confusion, fear or expression that normally indicates that one is a culprit or an accomplice on the faces of either Christophe, or Mercure, or others of his friends? Did you not witness a secret consternation among them which might make you believe they were guilty of a crime so heinous that, for the public good, it deserves to be punished to the full extent of the law?

A - I have only been in contact with the blacks for a short time so that I do not know them well enough to judge their thoughts merely by observing their expressions. I witnessed no secret conversations among them concerning this situation. In fact I noticed nothing upon which to base the slightest suspicion.

Called upon to withhold nothing and to make any comments and objections he thought appropriate, he stated that he had nothing to add.

When the cross-examination and his answers were read to him, he swore upon his soul and his conscience that they were accurate. Requested to sign, he did so with us, Athanase de Mézières, Infantry Company, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge, and the militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Jean-Barthelmy Charbonnet, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 21, 1770, I, Captain of the Infantry, etc., have summoned Cupidon, Mr. Charbonnet's slave driver, who, after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand on the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Do you know any unruly negro or any scoundrel on Mr. de Mézières' plantation? Who?

A - No.

Q 2 - Have you noticed that Mr. de Mézières' negroes were unhappy in general, or in particular, because of the arrival of Mr. Verret, the overseer of Mr. de Mézières' plantation?

A - Mr. de Mézières' negroes have no contact with those of Mr. Pain and Mr. Charbonnet to whom I belong, and I cannot know what they think. I do not talk to them and we have nothing in common.

Q 3 - Have you not heard that Mr. Verret was hard on the negroes, that he beat them often and for minor infractions? From whom did you hear that?

A - Jacob, Mr. Pain's negro surgeon said that Mr. Verret used a stick to beat a negro named Joseph who belonged to Mr. de Mézières. Joseph who was sawing wood fell down as a result. Because of his blows he developed a hernia. Jacob, called in to treat him, told me that a negro named Christophe was also beaten with a stick by Mr. Verret.

Q 4 - Is it true that you heard the shot that was fired at Mr. Verret?

A - I heard a loud gunshot. I do not know if it was fired at Mr. Verret. A short time later I heard someone cry out, "Help, help!" Being in the yard, I saw Mr. Verret appear shortly after. I asked Mr. Verret if he was wounded, and he

said no. I then said, "That is good!" and afterward both of us returned to Mr. Charbonnet's house.

Q 5 - Why were you not asleep, and why were you the only negro at this plantation up and around? It does not seem coincidental, and it would be better for you to tell the truth. You are not ignorant and know the customs of the French. If you insist on denial, you will have to go to town with the criminal, you will be separated from your wife and children, and you will lose your harvest. Then if the truth becomes known, as is likely, you, who knew it and did not admit it, will be considered as guilty as the criminal.

A - It was not late, it was after supper. Being the slave driver, I must go to bed after the others to give an account to my master. I know that the French are the masters. If they send me to town it will be a mistake. I know nothing and I have nothing more to say.

Q 6 - When your master sent you to Mr. de Mézières' quarters, was the pirogue you used to cross the river at its usual place?

A - There is only one little pirogue at our plantation and it was tied at my master's landing. I used it to cross.

Q 7 - When you crossed the scrubland to Mr. de Mézières' quarters, did you meet anyone? When you arrived, did you see negroes gathered outside or inside the cabins? What were they doing? What were they talking about? Who spoke to you first? What did he ask?

A - I saw no one on the way. I went straight to Mercure's cabin. I found him against his fireplace chatting with Charlotte, his wife, and Escapin who let me in.

Q 8 - Did the three negroes, Mercure, Charlotte, and Escapin, know what had just happened, or did you tell them? What did they say about it?

A - They knew nothing. I went outside with Mercure. As soon as we were outside, I told him what had happened. I told him that Messrs. Charbonnet and Verret had sent me to take a roll call. We visited the cabins one after another. All the negroes were there; I saw them and heard them.

Q 9 - What did you do after taking roll call? How much time elapsed between your hearing the shot and your taking the roll call?

A - About an hour could have elapsed between the shot and the roll call. After the roll call I returned immediately with Jacob, Mr. Charbonnet's negro surgeon, and with Mercure and Pierre, Mr. de Mézières' slaves.

Q 10 - What did the Negroes tell you on the way from Mr. de Mézières' quarters to Mr. Charbonnet's house?

A - The conversation was confined to their concern about the gunshot and the discussion of who might have fired it. Pierre said that he had heard the shot as well as the cries, and that the other negroes did not want to believe him.

Q 11 - What happened at Mr. Charbonnet's house when you returned?

A - My master asked if all Mr. de Mézières' negroes were in the quarters. I told him yes then I left. I went to the kitchen to get something to eat, went home and went to bed.

Q 12 - Tell us everything you might know.

A - I know nothing and have nothing to say.

The cross-examination and his answers were read to him. He swore upon his soul and his conscience that they were accurate. Requested to sign, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor and Judge of the Post, have summoned before me, Jacob, a negro belonging to Mr. Pain. Having sworn to tell the truth, his right hand over the crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Do you know any unruly or rascally negroes on Mr. de Mézières' plantation? Who?

A - No.

Q 2 - Have you noticed that Mr. de Mézières' negroes were unhappy in general or in particular because of Mr. Verret's arrival? Have any displayed such a feeling?

A - I know nothing and no negro has said anything about this.

Q 3 - Have you not heard that Mr. Verret was mean, that he often beat negroes? Which ones did he beat or had beaten? Who told you that?

A - At my master's house, I heard Mr. Verret say that he had beaten some negroes. After a beating, Jacob and Valentin remained in bed. The next day Mr. Verret had them taken out and given twenty lashes each. He also beat Antoine. I know of no others.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot? Who shot Mr. Verret? What time was it then? Where were you and did you hear any cries?

A - I heard the shot and no cries. It could have been nine o'clock in the evening. I had gone to Mr. de Mézières' quarters with Mr. Verret's permission in order to see Joseph who had recently developed a hernia. Afterwards I went to Otis' hut, and there I heard the shot.

Q 5 - Did the other negroes hear it also? Did you go to the hut? What did they say?

A - Otis and Escapin heard it also. Otis cried that it was a frightful gunshot. I said that it might be the young master who I had seen when I embarked, shooting at wolves. Shortly afterward Cupidon, Mr. Charbonnet's slave driver, came and told Mercure to take the roll. Cupidon, Mercure, Pierre, and I crossed to Mr. Charbonnet's house.

Q 6 - Did Mercure come to Otis' hut when the shot was fired? Had any negroes told Mercure that someone had fired? Was Escapin still at Otis' hut while Cupidon was at Mercure's hut?

A - Mercure did not come. He was asleep. No negroes went to see him or awaken him, and, at the time of Cupidon's arrival, Escapin had just gone to Mercure's hut.

Q 7 - When you arrived, did you see Christophe? Or did someone tell you that he was there? Who? Did you arrive long before the gunshot?

A - It could have been eight o'clock in the evening when I crossed to the quarters. I was with Escapin who had just returned from the Natchitoches Post with a letter for Mr. Verret. I arrived an hour before the shot was fired, Henry told me that Christophe had fever and was in bed.

Q 8 - What did you, Cupidon, Mercure, Pierre, talk about on your way to Mr. Charbonnet's house? Did you know that someone had shot Mr. Verret? What did they say? Were all of Mr. de Mézières' negroes present at roll call?

A - Mercure was distressed because Mr. Charbonnet had not come in person. It would have been preferable for him to see the negroes. Cupidon told them about Mr. Verret's experience. I attended Mercure's roll call and heard all of them answer.

Q 9 - What happened at Mr. Charbonnet's house when you were there?

A - Mercure told Mr. Verret that the negroes were in the quarters. Mr. Verret said that it was fine and that the one who fired the shot was clumsy. Afterward, Mr. Charbonnet called Mr. Verret into another room. Immediately Mr. Verret called Mercure. He crossed the river to get Christophe who was brought back, put in irons, and kept all night by Jean-Baptiste, Mr. de Mézières' negro who had come with Mercure.

Q 10 - What was said to Christophe when he arrived at Mr. Charbonnet's house, and what did he answer?

A - I know nothing about it. I had left and gone to bed.

Q 11 - When you arrived at your hut, were the other negroes in bed, or had they perhaps assembled? And if so, what were they talking about?

A - In the quarters all was quiet and silent and everyone was asleep.

Q 12 - Did you learn anything the next day?

A - I started cutting wood at daybreak and returned at noon. After lunch I went back to work, and stopped on Mr. de Mézières' orders to accompany him to Natchitoches.

He was read the cross-examination along with his answers. He stated they were all accurate. Requested to swear again, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, etc., had brought before me, Joseph, a mulatto slave belonging to Lassonde, resident of Opelousas⁴ He came to this Post with the kind permission of his master in order to work. Jacob placed his right hand over the holy crucifix, swore to tell the truth, and testified as follows.

Q 1 - Since moving here, have you known any unruly and thieving negroes on Mr. de Mézières' plantation? Who?

A - No.

Q 2 - Have you noticed that Mr. de Mézières' negroes were unhappy since Mr. Verret arrived? Did they say anything about it?

A - Concerning Mr. Verret's arrival, the negroes told me that they were made to obey their masters and would do so.

Q 3 - Did you not hear that Mr. Verret was mean, that he beat the negroes? Which ones did he beat? And who told you?

A - I heard nothing.

Q 4 - After the orders were given and publicized, did the negroes hand over all of their guns to Mr. Verret? Is it true that you sold one to Otis? Why did you sell it, and does Otis still have it?

A - I seldom go to the negro quarters, and I have little contact with them. What I know about this I learned from Mr. de Mézières himself. I sold no gun to Otis, but I gave a big *thiolliere* to Jean-Baptiste about eight months ago. I had promised it to him since his first trip. I do not know if he still has it.

Q 5 - Did you have any knowledge, directly or indirectly, before or after the shot was fired at Mr. Verret, as to who could possibly do so awful a thing? You are a creole, kindly reared by the French, you know the laws, and cannot be unmindful of the fact that whoever conceals a crime incriminates himself, and once discovered, as happens sooner or later, is punished as severely as the criminal himself.

A - I have no knowledge of anything, and heard nothing. If someone has fired the shot, I assume he would not dare talk about it in my presence. I am beyond reproach and have no fear.

He was read the cross-examination and his answers, and stated that they were accurate. Requested to swear again, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 21, 1770, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor and Judge of this Post, had brought before me, a certain Joseph, negro slave belonging to Mr. Dupin, militia officer. He extended his right hand over the holy crucifix, swore to tell the truth and testified as follows.

Q 1 - Do you know Christophe, a negro belonging to Mr. de Mézières?

A - I have known him since I have been on this Post.

Q 2 - Did you see him and provide him with shelter, food and other things during his last escape? What kind of shelter, food and other things could you provide for him?

A - While working in the woods, I saw Christophe. I did not provide him with shelter. I learned three days later that he had run away. I did give him gunpowder and lead at the request of a negro belonging to Mr. Jacob Lambre.⁴ There might have been about three shots.

Q 3 - Did Christophe tell you that Mr. Verret was mean and that he hated him? Did you know why he wanted that gunpowder and lead? Did he have a gun?

A - Christophe told me nothing. I do not know if he had a gun nor why he wanted the gunpowder or lead. He was read this cross-examination and his responses. He stated that they were accurate. Requested to swear again, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge of this Post, summoned before me, Jean-Baptiste, a negro slave belonging to Mr. Jacob Lambre. Vowing to tell the truth, he extended his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified and swore to tell the truth.

Q 1 - Do you know the negro Christophe who belongs to Mr. de Mézières? How long have you known him? Where did you see him? On what occasion?

A - I have known him since he came to this Post. I saw him one holiday. He told me that he was going to pick up something for an Indian who was ill on the plantation, and that he had come with his master.

Q 2 - Did you see him when he ran away? Did you give him gunpowder and lead on behalf of Joseph, Mr. Dupin's slave? Did Christophe have a gun?

A - I heard that he had run away. I did not see him while he was gone. I gave him neither gunpowder nor lead, and I do not know if he had a gun.

Q 3 - Did Christophe ever indicate that he was unhappy with Mr. Verret, that the latter was mean and harassed him?

A - Christophe told me that there was a new overseer and that he had been sent to get some root for an Indian who was ill. That is all I heard. This cross-

⁴Jacob Lambre, a native of the German Coast, had married Thérèse Lavasseur, on January 23, 1753. He was 41 in 1772 (Mills, *Natchitoches Colonials*, p. 26). The 1774 census lists him as owning nineteen slaves (*Ibid.*, p. 32.).

examination and his answers were read to him. He said that they were accurate, he insisted upon it, and asked to verify it again. He did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers and our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 23, 1770, I, Athanase de Mézières, Infantry Captain, etc., have summoned Joseph, the negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, who after swearing to tell the truth, held his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - If you are ill, what is the reason? Why did you say that you had a hernia, when the surgeon who examined you says no?

A - I have not been well since Mr. Verret hit me on the loins with a stick. That area is very swollen. Jacob, Mr. Pain's negro, treated me for that, and I am a bit better. Mercure, the slave driver, was a witness as well as Jacob and Pierre, the young mulatto.

Q 2 - Are you glad that Mr. Verret is overseer? Have you spoken against him, and heard others do so?

A - Mr. de Mézières is my master and I conform to his wishes. I neither spoke against Mr. Verret nor heard others do so.

Q 3 - Were you in the quarters when someone fired at Mr. Verret? In what cabin were you? Did you hear the gunshot? Who was with you?

A - I did not hear the gunshot. I was ill and in bed in my cabin. No one was there, except Henry who lives there, and I saw no one that night except Mercure and Otis who awakened me when they took roll.

Q 4 - Do you know that Christophe was missing from the quarters the day the gun was fired? Did you see Christophe with a gun since he was a runaway? Did you hear Christophe say anything? Did you notice some activity that might lead you to think that he made the attempt on Mr. Verret's life? Finally, did you see or hear anything in this regard among the other negroes?

A - The day of the shot, Christophe was in the quarters with fever. I learned from Henry that Mercure had sent Christophe some broth by a little negro boy, since it was already late. I did not see Christophe with a gun since he ran away. I have not heard Christophe speak against Mr. Verret. I have no idea who could have fired the shot, having no indication from anyone about anything.

He was read this cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take an oath again, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, etc. summoned before me, a certain Antoine, negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. After taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, he testified as follows.

Q 1 - Were you in the quarters the day the shot was fired? In what cabin? Who was with you? Did you hear the shot?

A - I worked that day. I went to bed early and I did not hear the shot. I was awakened by Mercure at the time of the roll call and went back to sleep immediately.

Q 2 - Was Christophe in the quarters that day? Did you see him, and what was he doing? Did you notice whether Christophe had a gun since his running away? Did you hear anyone express unhappiness with Mr. Verret? Are you certain that Christophe was at roll call?

A - I saw Christophe during the day and he had fever. I also saw him at sunset at Jacob's cabin. He was still ill. I have not seen him with a gun since he returned. Mr. Verret beat Christophe when he was sawing wood. Christophe said nothing during or after the beating. I do not know if Christophe was at roll call because I was sleeping and I did not get up.

He was read this cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take an oath again, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières., Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same day and year as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned before me a certain Valentin, slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. After taking the oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, he testified as follows.

Q 1 - Were you in the quarters last Sunday? What did you do all day? Did some negroes leave the quarters that day without Mr. Verret's permission? That night did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret? What were you doing then? In what cabin were you and with whom?

A - Last Sunday I did not leave the quarters. I was cracking corn. All the negroes were in the quarters or on the plantation. I did not hear the shot. I was in bed at Escapin's. Mercure awakened me for roll call. After I answered, he told me to go back to bed.

Q 2 - Was Christophe in the quarters that same day? What was he doing? Did you see him in the evening? Did you notice if he had a gun? Did he express unhappiness with Mr. Verret? Do you know if Christophe was at roll call?

A - Christophe came to eat with me at noon. I saw him cracking corn. I saw him also in the evening after dark. I did not see him with a gun. He did not say anything negative about Mr. Verret. When Mercure took roll I learned that all the negroes were in the quarters.

Q 3 - Could you find out through conversation among the negroes who made the attempt on Mr. Verret's life?

A - No.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, etc., summoned before me, Jacob, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. He placed his right hand over the holy crucifix, took an oath to tell the truth, and testified as follows.

Q 1 - Did you spend Sunday in the quarters? What did you do? Do you know if any negro crossed the river that day to go anywhere? Did you see Christophe? What was he doing? Did you hear him say that he was unhappy with Mr. Verret.

A - I did not set foot outside the quarters. I have no knowledge of any negro leaving the quarters that day. At sunset I saw Christophe in Otis' cabin. Christophe was complaining a great deal about the ailment caused by the blows received from Mr. Verret. I heard Christophe say nothing about Mr. Verret.

Q 2 - Did you see Christophe with a gun after he ran away?

A - I did not see him with any kind of gun or knife.

Q 3 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret? Where were you then? Did you hear the negroes talk about it? What did they say and think?

A - I heard nothing. I was asleep. I was called by the slave driver for roll call. I asked if they needed me. I was told no and went back to sleep. I learned nothing until the next day. I did not hear the negroes speak of anything.

Q 4 - Of the negroes who were beaten by Mr. Verret, do you know of any who are unhappy with him?

A - I know of no murmuring or unhappiness about him.

He was read the present cross-examination and his responses and he said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., have summoned before me Diogène, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. After taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, he testified as follows.

Q 1 - Were you in the quarters last Sunday? Did you not go out? What did you do during the day, and did you see any negroes who might have left the plantation without permission?

A - I did not leave during the day. I worked in my lot. I do not know that any negro left except Escapin. I went to bed and went to sleep early.

Q 2 - Did you hear the negroes say that they were unhappy with Mr. Verret, especially those whom he chastised or had chastised?

A - No.

Q 3 - Did you ever see Christophe with a gun after he ran away?

A - No.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot that was fired Sunday night at Mr. Verret?

A - No, I was asleep.

Q 5 - Did someone come to awaken you? Why? Who was it?

A - Mercure called me, then later told me, "Go to bed and stay there."

Q 6 - Have you heard, among the negroes on the plantation, or among others, anyone say who might have fired the shot at Mr. Verret? What did they think?

A - I did not hear anyone say anything.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

The aforementioned Diogène stated, moreover, that Sunday night, about dusk, Christophe had had supper with him. Christophe ate little, felt ill, and left for his cabin saying that he was going to bed.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, etc., have had appear

before me, one named Cotty, a negro slave belonging to Mr. Mézières, and who after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Did you remain on the plantation all day last Sunday, and what did you do?

A - I did not go out. I was chopping wood.

Q 2 - Do you know of any negroes who left the plantation Sunday?

A - All the negroes were on the plantation, and did not go out except for Escapin.

Q 3 - Did you notice if Christophe had a gun since he ran away?

A - No.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret?

A - No.

Q 5 - Did you sleep alone in your cabin? Who else might have slept there? Are they the ones who normally do so?

A - Apollon lives in my cabin with Colette, his wife, as well as Christophe. All of them went to bed early, Christophe had fever. I did not see him leave.

Q 6 - Did anyone come to wake you up, and if so who, and what did he say?

A - The slave driver came to awaken us and call us. Everyone answered, I saw them all.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned before me Henry, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. After taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, he testified as follows.

Q 1 - Were you at the plantation or in the quarters last Sunday? Do you know of any negroes leaving the plantation that day?

A - I did not go out that day. I worked on my lot. I went back to my cabin rather late. I do not think any negro left except Escapin who had gone to Natchitoches with Mr. Verret's permission.

Q 2 - Did you see Christophe during the day Sunday, and what was he doing?

A - I saw him shucking corn to crack it. He was overtaken by fever.

Q 3 - Did you notice Christophe with a gun since he ran away, especially last Sunday? Did you see Christophe that night? At what time did you see him?

A - I did not see him with a gun. I went to see Christophe at dark that Sunday. He had a fever.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret, or who told you a shot had been fired? Were you asleep, and were you awakened?

A - I heard nothing; I was asleep. Mercure came to awaken me. I asked him what he wanted. He said he did not want anything, and I went back to sleep.

Q 5 - Did you hear Christophe or others say they were unhappy with Mr. Verret? A - I heard nothing.

He was read the present cross-examination, and his answers and said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia

officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned before me, Leveille, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières. After taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand on the holy crucifix, he testified as follows.

Q 1 - What did you do Sunday? Did you leave the plantation? Did you notice others leaving the plantation?

A - I did not go out. After noon I went to my lot. I do not know that anyone left except Escapin who had come to Natchitoches with Mr. Verret's permission.

Q 2 - Did you see Christophe during that Sunday? At what time did you see him? What was he doing?

A - After sunset I saw Christophe in Jean-Baptiste's cabin. Christophe went out shortly afterward saying that he was ill and was going to bed.

Q 3 - Did you see Christophe with a gun since he ran away?

A - No.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret Sunday night?

A - I heard nothing. I was in bed and asleep.

Q 5 - Did someone awaken you?

A - Mercure awakened me, he told me, "Stay and sleep."

Q 6 - Did you hear the negroes say anything the next day? Did you learn who could have fired that gunshot and what they thought of it?

A - Early in the morning Mercure sent me to work with Jean-Baptiste. Jean-Baptiste was not there but arrived later with Messrs. Verret and Charbonnet. It was then I learned what had happened.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, have had appear before me one named Jean-Pierre, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, and who, after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand on the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Did you not leave the quarters during the day Sunday? Where did you go? Do you know if any negroes left?

A - I did not go out. I stayed in my cabin and I do not know if any negroes left.

Q 2 - Who are the negroes who live in your cabin?

A - Cotty and Christophe.

Q 3 - Did Christophe go out that day? What did he do?

A - Christophe went for a walk in the quarters and shucked some corn. He had fever.

Q 4 - Did you see Christophe with a gun since he ran away?

A - No.

Q 5 - Did Christophe go to bed early? At what time?

A - He went to bed shortly after dark, and so did I.

Q 6 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret?

A - My child was crying, and I got up with him, went near the fireplace, and later heard a loud shot as well as a voice crying out, "Help, help!" in the direction of Mr. Pain's house.

Q 7 - Did you go outside to see and hear what was happening?

A - No.

Q 8 - Was Christophe in bed? Did he wake up?

A - He was in bed and he did not wake up.

Q 9 - Did someone come to your hut? What did he want?

A - Mercure came to call me. I asked him what he wanted and he told me that everything was all right and for me to go back to sleep.

Q 10 - Did Mercure call Christophe and did the latter answer?

A - Yes.

Q 11 - Did someone come again afterward, and what was said?

A - Mercure had a rope under his arm. He went to Christophe's bed and told him, "Get up!" and when Christophe asked why, Mercure said that he had orders from Mr. Verret. Christophe then said, "There is no need to tie me up, I have done nothing wrong" and Mercure took him away without tying him.

Q 12 - Did you not know why Christophe was being taken away?

A - Mercure said that he had heard Mr. Verret say that Christophe had fired a shot because of the beating.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in my presence, Athanase de Mézières, and in that of Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, summoned before me, Escapin, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, and who after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - During the day last Sunday, were you in the quarters, and if not, where were you?

A - I came to Natchitoches last Saturday. I spent part of Sunday with Mr. de Mézières' servants. After lunch I went with Constance, a negro from the other side of the river, to get herbs for a little negro who was ill. I left for the plantaion about two hours before sunset. I went to Mr. Pain's house where I found Mr. Verret. I gave him Mr. de Mézières' letter, and immediately crossed the river with Jacob, Mr. Pain's negro, to return to the quarters. We went to Joseph's cabin where Joseph was ill, and then to Otis' where we began to talk.

Q 2 - Who was in Otis' cabin with you? Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret?

A - Otis, his wife and I had been in the cabin about a quarter of an hour when Pierre arrived saying, "What? You did not hear the shot?" To which Jacob said, "Well, fine. It is Mr. Louis, my young master, shooting wolves, which were howling when we arrived." Pierre said that he had heard a voice crying out, "Help, Jacob, help, Jacob!" Jacob replied, "You like to tease everybody." I then went to Mercure's cabin where his wife was near the fire, and Mercure was in bed. A short time later Cupidon, Mr. Charbonnet's driver, came to call Mercure. They went together to take roll among the negroes. After that I quickly went to bed.

Q 3 - Have you seen Christophe with a gun since he ran away?

A - No.

Q 4 - Do you know if Christophe left the quarters Sunday?

A - I learned from Mercure that Christophe was ill and Mercure had told him, "Remain quiet. If it continues I shall tell Mr. Verret tomorrow."

Q 5 - Did you hear Christophe say that Mr. Verret was mean and that he was unhappy with him?

A - No.

Q 6 - Do you know if Christophe was present at roll call?

A - I heard Mercure say that Christophe was at roll call, that he had found him in bed.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned before me, Pierre, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, and who after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Where did you spend Sunday? Did you leave the plantation? Do you know of any negroes who left that day?

A - I did not set foot outside the quarters and I know of no one who left except Escapin who went to Natchitoches with Mr. Verret's permission.

Q 2 - Did you see Christophe that same day? What was he doing? Did you notice that he left the quarters to cross the river?

A - I saw him in the quarters all that day. He even came to my cabin. He said that he was ill and that his whole body ached because of the beating Mr. Verret had given him. That evening I heard him talking with Jean-Pierre as it began to grow dark.

Q 3 - Did you see Christophe with a gun since his escape and return? Did Christophe tell you that he was unhappy with Mr. Verret?

A - No.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret? What time was it? Where were you?

A - I was in my cabin when I heard the shot. I stepped outside, then went to Otis' where I found Jacob, Mr. Pain's negro. I said to him, "Jacob, did you hear the shot?" Jacob answered, "That is Mr. Louis shooting wolves," and I replied, "But, I heard some cries," then Jacob said, "That is Mr. Louis yelling at the wolves." It was around supper time.

Q 5 - What happened in the quarters and what did the people do?

A - I was in bed and Mercure came to call me. He told me to take my coat and follow him. Together we went to Mr. Charbonnet's house.

Q 6 - Do you know if Christophe was at roll call?

A - He was there.

Q 7 - What did you do at Mr. Charbonnet's house? What did you see? What was going on?

A - When we arrived at Mr. Charbonnet's house, Mercure told Mr. Verret that everyone was present at roll call. Mr. Charbonnet called Mr. Verret to his

room. Mr. Verret called Mercure, and shortly thereafter, Mercure crossed the river and went back to the quarters with me.

Q 8 - What did you do when you arrived?

A - Mercure called Otis with Jean-Baptiste. They went together to Christophe's cabin. Mercure had a rope and began to tie up Christophe who said, "Why tie me up? I have done nothing; it is not necessary," and Christophe went readily to Mr. Charbonnet's and I went to bed.

Q 9 - Did you learn in the quarters what the shot was about?

A - No.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre La-coste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, summoned before me Otis, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, who after taking an oath to tell the truth, placed his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Where did you spend last Sunday? Were you in the quarters or elsewhere on the plantation? Do you know if the other negroes were there?

A - I spent the night in my plot. At daybreak I went to find Mr. Verret who was at Mr. Charbonnet's. I asked him what he wanted me to do the next day and what area he wanted me to plow. Then I went to Mr. de Mézières' house where the woman Colette and I embarked to cross to the quarters.

Q 2 - How many pirogues were there at Mr. de Mézières' landing?

A - There were two. I took the smaller one to go to the quarters. The next day the little negro named Martin took it from the same spot to bring some milk to Mr. Verret.

Q 3 - When did you arrive at the quarters? Did you know that Christophe was there? What was he doing?

A - I saw Christophe leaving Jean-Baptiste's cabin.

Q 4 - Do you know if Christophe crossed the river?

A - I learned from Colette and Jean-Pierre that Christophe did not cross. Mercure told me that Christophe was ill.

Q 5 - Did you see Christophe with a gun since he ran away? Did Christophe tell you that he was unhappy with Mr. Verret?

A - No.

Q 6 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret? With whom were you at the time?

A - I heard a big shot at eight o'clock, or thereabouts. I was with Jacob, Mr. Charbonnet, and Escapin.

Q 7 - What did you think about it?

A - Jacob said that it was Louis Pain, his young master, shooting wolves. Pierre said he heard cries, and Jacob replied that Louis Pain, his young master, screamed wildly on such occasions.

Q 8 - What happened later in the quarters?

A - Cupidon, Mr. Charbonnet's slave driver, arrived; he and Mercure completed the roll call. The gunshot had been fired about a quarter of an hour earlier. I learned from the woman Colette, from Mercure, and from Cupidon, that Christophe was in the same bed as Cotty.

Q 9 - What happened then? Was there anything new in the quarters?

A - Mercure went with Cupidon to Mr. Charbonnet's house where Mr. Verret was. He returned to the quarters, came to my cabin and told me to get

my hat and follow him. He said the same thing to Jean-Baptiste. The three of us went to Christophe's. Mercure wanted to tie him up but he asked, "what have I done? Am I not sick enough? Do I have to be tied up too?" Then we began to walk, Mercure, Jean-Baptiste and I, and Christophe followed us.

Q 10 - What did you see and what did you hear when you arrived at Mr. Charbonnet's house? Who was there? What did they say and do to Christophe?

A - When we arrived at Mr. Charbonnet's house, Mr. Verret said to Christophe, "My friend, you do not shoot well." Christophe answered, "What do you mean, I do not shoot well?" Then Mr. Charbonnet, taking Christophe by one arm, had his feet put in irons and his hands tied behind his back. He said, "You will be broken on the wheel even if I have to pay half your price to Mr. de Mézières." Shortly afterward, Mercure, Jean-Baptiste and I left. As we were getting away from the house, Mr. Verret cried out, "You, Otis and Mercure, you may go. And you Jean-Baptiste, come back!" Mercure and I crossed the river, returned to the quarters and went to bed.

Q 11 - What do you think of this shooting? What do the other negroes think?

A - I do not think anything. Maybe it was a thief.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, summoned before me, Jean-Baptiste, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, who, after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Where were you last Sunday? Were you in the quarters or in your plot? Do you know of any negro leaving the plantation?

A - I went to my lot. I do not know what the others did since they were working at some distance. When I returned late, I saw most of them. I do not believe any were missing.

Q 2 - What did you do with the gun you got from Joseph, the mulatto?

A - I sold it to an Indian for deerskins and oil.

Q 3 - Why did you say to Mr. de Mézières' grandchildren that the shot fired at Mr. Verret was intended to frighten him? Did you say that?

A - I said no such thing, but I heard others say that Mr. Verret was shot at at such close range that it probably was done to frighten him.

Q 4 - Had you seen Christophe with a gun, gunpowder, or bullets since he ran away? Did Christophe speak against Mr. Verret?

A - No.

Q 5 - Sunday, did you see Christophe during the day or the night? At what time did you see him, and what was he doing?

A - I saw Christophe at suppertime. He was complaining about a fever.

Q 6 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret?

A - No, I was asleep.

Q 7 - What happened after that in the quarters? Who came?

A - Mercure called me and woke me up. I asked him what he wanted. He said he wanted nothing, but he had orders from Mr. Verret to take Otis and me to tie up Christophe. We went to Christophe's cabin for that purpose. We told him we had come to tie him up on orders from Mr. Verret. Christophe told us

that he had done nothing, that it was not necessary. He followed us freely as far as Mr Charbonnet's house.

Q 8 - What happened when you reached Mr. Charbonnet's house?

A - When we arrived, we heard a great deal of talk about the shot fired at Mr. Verret. Mr. Charbonnet got the irons and put them on Christophe's feet. I was leaving with Mercure and Otis when Mr Verret called me back and told me to watch Christophe, and not to go to sleep.

Q 9 - During the night did you hear Christophe say anything?

A - I heard him say nothing except that the irons were too little and hurt his feet.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières summoned Mercure, negro slave driver belonging to Mr. de Mézières, who, after taking an oath to tell the truth, his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified as follows.

Q 1 - Where did you spend Sunday? Were you in the quarters or in your plot? Do you know if others left the premises that day?

A - I spent the whole morning in my plot. I left at noon and returned in the afternoon.

Q 2 - Was Christophe in the quarters? Do you know if he crossed the river? At what time did you see him?

A - I did not see him during the morning. I was with him that evening. He came to tell me he was ill and asked me to tell Mr. Verret the next day, should he ask for him at work. I told him to go to bed.

Q 3 - Did you see Christophe with a gun since he ran away? Did you learn from others if he had one?

A - No.

Q 4 - Did you hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret?

A - No, I was asleep.

Q 5 - Did any negro come to your cabin to wake you and tell you that he had heard the shot?

A - Escapin came, but I did not see him because I was asleep. Cupidon, Mr. Charbonnet's slave driver, came to tell me that his master wanted us to call the roll in the cabins which we did. We saw all the negroes and heard all of them answer.

Q 6 - What did you do after roll call?

A - We went to get Pierre. With him and Cupidon, we went to report to Mr. Charbonnet. Mr. Verret then said "Good heavens, what fine people you are at Mr. de Mézières' place." I replied, "How is that, Sir?" Mr. Verret said someone had fired at him at the foot of the bluff. Mr. Charbonnet took Mr. Verret by the arm and led him into a room. Mr. Verret came back and ordered me to go to the quarters and bring back Christophe, which I did.

Q 7 - What did you do when you reached the quarters?

A - I woke up Otis and Jean-Baptiste. The three of us wanted to tie up Christophe, but he said he had done nothing, and he even had fever. We left him free, and he followed us slowly to Mr. Charbonnet's house.

Q 8 - What did you see at Mr. Charbonnet's house? What did you hear? What happened to Christophe?

A - When we reached the house, Mr. Charbonnet scarcely gave Christophe time to speak. All he could say was what Mr. Verret had told him. "Why, Christophe, you are a very poor shot." Christophe answered, "Sir, I do not know what you are trying to tell me." Mr. Charbonnet put irons on Christophe's feet, saying, "I ought to pay half of what you are worth to your master. You should be hanged and broken on the wheel." Christophe replied, "Sir, had I been bold enough to do such a thing, I would not have returned to the quarter; I would have gone away." Mr. Charbonnet took Christophe to a room, tied his hands behind his back, and left him with Jean-Baptiste. I left with Otis.

Q 9 - Did you notice where the pirogues had been taken during the night?

A - No. Of the two pirogues on the plantation, Otis had used one to take the woman Colette across the river. He had taken it near the quarters. It was still there the next morning. The other, which had remained at the landing, was full of water.

Q 10 - What do you think of this shot? Why, since some heard cries and calls were you, the slave driver, not called?

A - I do not know what to think about it. It is the fault of Jacob, Mr. Charbonnet's negro, that I was not called because he said the young masters were shooting wolves as they do every evening.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He said they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so in our presence, Athanase de Mézières, and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 23, 1770, we the undersigned officers of the militia, assistants named by Mr. de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge of the Natchitoches Post and its territories, have been requested by Mr. de Mézières to express our opinions and judgment about the statements contained in this procedure. We certify and verify, on our conscience and our honor, that the aforesaid statements were heard, read, examined, and signed by us. We do not believe the negro witnesses heard can be accused of complicity. Their statements are consistent and without contradiction, their manner natural, and their demeanor does not suggest guilt. Nor are their answers calculated. They answered quickly and freely, and everything considered, we determine that they must not be held for trial. However, they must appear should Mr. Verret or anyone else provide evidence against them.

Signed, Bormé, Poisot, Pierre Dupin, militia officers, our assistants, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 24, 1770, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned before me, Christophe, a negro slave belonging to Mr. de Mézières, who, after taking an oath to tell the truth, placed his right hand over the holy crucifix, testified and swore to do so.

Q 1 - Where did you spend the day last Sunday?

A - I did not leave the quarters.

Q 2 - Why did you not go to work in your plot?

A - Mr. Verret had beaten me. I was not feeling well and I had a fever, as I told Mercure. That is why I did not go to my plot. I shucked corn and cracked some to eat. That night I went to Diogène's cabin and he invited me to supper. I ate about two spoonfuls and went to bed. Charlotte, the slave driver's wife, sent me a little bit of broth by a little boy named Marin.

Q 3 - At what time did you retire? Was it light or dark?

A - At sunset.

Q 4 - Why did you get gunpowder and bullets from Joseph, Mr. Dupin's negro? What did you do with them?

A - I saw Joseph in the woods sawing boards with English-speaking people. I ate with them. I had nothing else. This took place while I was a runaway.

Q 5 - Where do you live and who sleeps in that cabin? With whom do you sleep?

A - I live in Cotty's cabin. We sleep together. Jean-Pierre and Colette, his wife, live there also.

Q 6 - Last Sunday evening were Cotty, Jean-Pierre and Colette, his wife, in the cabin when you went to bed?

A - They were all there.

Q 7 - Why did you say Mr. Verret was mean?

A - I did not say that to anyone.

Q 8 - Did you have a gun since you ran away? Who lent or gave you that gun?

A - I have had no gun since I came to the plantation. Mr. Verret had them handed over after the publication of the order.

Q 9 - Did you not hear the shot fired at Mr. Verret Sunday night?

A - I did not hear it because I was asleep.

Q 10 - How could you sleep if, as you say, you were ill and feverish?

A - My whole body was hurting, but when the fever left me I fell asleep.

Q 11 - Did someone not come to wake you up? Why?

A - Mercure knocked at the door. Jean-Pierre, who was up, opened it, Mercure called us and we answered. He left, and I remained in bed and went back to sleep.

Q 12 - Did someone return? Why?

A - A long time afterward Mercure came with Otis and Jean-Baptiste to get me. Mercure said he had come on Mr. Verret's orders to take me to Mr. Charbonnet's house. I got up, took my hat, and followed him freely.

Q 13 - What happened when you went to Mr. Charbonnet's house?

A - Mr. Verret spoke to me and I answered. Mr. Charbonnet said, "I know this negro to be a bad one; last year he tried to cut Pierre, our mulatto, in the head with a hatchet in the ash grove." Mr. Charbonnet put me in irons and tied my arms behind my back. Jean-Baptiste who was guarding me untied me afterward because he saw that the rope was cutting my arms.

Q 14 - Why did you try to cut Pierre with a hatchet?

A - It did not happen. Pierre came to my cabin to sleep with my wife, but I said nothing for fear of causing a disturbance and being blamed by my master.

Q 15 - Did Mr. Charbonnet say anything else? Did he beat you or threaten to beat you?

A - Mr. Charbonnet said that if he knew they were going to do nothing to me, he would buy me to kill me.

Q 16 - Did you hear anyone say who might have fired at Mr. Verret?

A - No.

He was read the present cross-examination and his answers. He insisted that they were accurate. Requested to take another oath, he did so on our presence, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin and Pierre Lacoste,
Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned Mr. Noël Verret, that he might present the measurements of the footprints believed to belong to the unnamed assailant as stated in the sixth response of his testimony. The measurements were presented by him. Requested to sign, Mr. Verret did so with us, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Noël Verret, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Laçoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, the same date as above, I, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, etc., summoned Mr. Anty, called Laforme⁵, master cobbler established at this Post, who had in his possession the three measurements of the footprints provided him by Mr. Verret and Mr. Charbonnet. They are believed to belong to the unnamed person who fired at Mr. Verret, [assumed to be] the negro Christophe who is seated on the floor, barefooted. Anty, called Laforme, compared measurements with those of the negro's foot, with Mr. Verret's approval. He declared and confirmed that the largest one, from the heel to the end of the big toe, was larger by one inch than the negro's foot. The second one from the heel to the end of the little toe was also larger by one half inch than the negro's foot. As for the third measurement, which shows the foot at its widest, there is about one twelfth of an inch difference between the footprint and the negro's foot. That is the testimony of Mr. Anty, called Laforme, who, requested to sign did so with us, Athanase de Mézières, etc., and Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants.

Signed, Anty, called Laforme, Athanase de Mézières, Bormé, Poisot, Dupin, and Pierre Lacoste, Clerk of Court.

Today, March 24, 1770, we, Athanase de Mézières, Captain of the Infantry, Lieutenant Governor, and Judge of Natchitoches and its territories, Messrs. Louis Bormé, Rémy Poisot, and Pierre Dupin, militia officers, our assistants, have examined the criminal suit presented to us and dated the nineteenth of this month by Mr. Noël Verret, overseer of Mr. de Mézières' plantation. Mr. Verret claims that an assassination attempt was made against him, and he suspects the negro Christophe. Mr. Verret appeared and his testimony was heard and taken. Mr. Charbonnet's testimony was heard and taken. Statements were taken from Cupidon, the negro slave driver; from Jacob, who belongs to Mr. Charbonnet; from Joseph, the mulatto belonging to Mr. Lassonde; from Joseph, the negro belonging to Mr. Dupin, militia officer; and from Jean-Baptiste, the negro belonging to Mr. Jacob Lambre. Others giving statements were Joseph, Valentin, Jacob, Diogène, Antoine, Cotty, Henry, Leveille, Jean-Pierre, Escapin, Pierre, Otis, Jean-Baptiste and Mercure, all belonging to Mr. de Mézières. The testimony gathered by Messrs. Bormé, Poisot, and Dupin, militia officers, our assistants, clears the aforementioned negroes from complicity. We examined carefully the cross-examination undergone by Christophe and his responses; Mr. Verret presented the footprints he and Mr. Charbonnet believed to be those of the unknown individual who fired at Mr. Verret. A comparison of the measurements with Christophe's feet was made by Mr. Anty, called Laforme, master cobbler. We have therefore concluded that Mr. Verret's suspicions are frivolous,

⁵Ignace Anty, dit Laforme, shoemaker, owned two slaves in 1766. (Mills, *Natchitoches*). He died Sept. 11, 1776. (Mills, *Natchitoches*, p. 145).

unfounded, injurious and disparaging to Mr. de Mézières plantation. We also found Mr. Charbonnet negligent in having the quarters visited and the roll call taken. He deserves blame because a careful search of the area near the place where the assassination attempt was attempted, a place where only blacks live, some of whom are known for their carousing, drunkenness and debauchery, would have helped elucidate the crime. We blame the carelessness, which he admitted in his statement, with which he searched the cabins for firearms as ordered by the ordinance. We exonerate M. de Mézières' negroes of complicity, and Christophe of attempted murder. We order the irons removed from him and broken. We command that he be set free, released from prison, and that a copy of the original of the current ordinance be made by an official in the Clerk of Court's office headed by Mr. Pierre Lacoste. We further order that a copy be posted in a prominent place of this Post. Done at the seat of the government, on the day and year mentioned above.

A certified copy has been left with the office of the Clerk of Court.