

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Wisconsin as an Abolitionist Stronghold  
1840-1855

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## INTRO

As a young writer, Thomas Jefferson, nation's third president, famously wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Today, many Americans identify these words as launching a democratic government in the face of dictatorship or monarchy. Students in the fifth grade recognize these overused words without a second thought to their meaning. Soldiers on the fronts of Afghanistan and Iraq carry these words into the desert hoping to spread them to oppressed women and men who do not have the strength to demand these rights for themselves under cruel and righteous regimes. However, in the years before Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863, the people of America limited the extent of Jefferson's libertarian words and all but white, land-owning males were exempt from its promise. In Wisconsin's pre-civil war years, abolitionist thoughts and ideas ruled the state. The cities of Milwaukee and Racine held meetings and formed committees to find a solution to the growing problem of slavery and how to stop the act of human ownership from spreading to other territories west of the Mississippi. Part of their solution was to offer their aid to fugitive slaves in an escape system that began, according to some sources, in the year 1804 in Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> So began the birth of the blacks' journey north to find absolution from slavery. Abolitionists north of the Mason and Dixon Line left candles in windows, coded quilts on clotheslines and scraps of food on back doorsteps for the dark passengers on their frightening journey. Though this all sounds romantic, the Underground Railroad was a very real and ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, *Flight to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1958), 22.

event in American and Wisconsin culture. Although there are many mythical tales of secret passages and underground segments to hide fugitive slaves along the Underground Railroad, many stories are not stretched that far from the truth. In fact, Wisconsin is a state that has many fascinating contributions to a romanticized, and somewhat controversial, topic. Even before Wisconsin achieved statehood in 1848, many abolitionists were already participating as guides along the Underground Railroad and spreading abolitionist ideal within their communities. Joseph Goodrich, a staunch anti-slavery man who founded the town of Milton, Wisconsin, used his two-story frame house turned stage-coach inn as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Residents of Racine County, Wisconsin, are thought to have hidden slaves in crawl spaces in the First Presbyterian Church. The city of Waukesha, Wisconsin (then Prairieville), began to publish a newspaper entitled *The Freeman*, which still prints today. Not only does Wisconsin have the romance of hideaways to show for the Underground Railroad, it also has the supporting history, which includes detailed accounts of Wisconsin's abolitionist ideals.

## **THESIS**

Not only did Wisconsin play a very important role in the fight for the abolition of slavery, it also set an incredible abolitionist backdrop for the rest of the Union by aiding in the escape of fugitive slaves and promoting propaganda that spoke to the immorality of slavery. This was achieved by aiding fugitive slaves to freedom using newspapers, unofficial anti-slavery meetings and fierce propaganda that promoted an abolitionist ideology between 1840 and 1855. Although Wisconsin cannot be credited with being the

epitome of abolitionist strongholds of the north, it certainly ranks high; the state's credit going to radical abolitionist Sherman Booth. The state however achieved strong anti-slavery feelings from its new settlers from the east coast, who transported the idea of morality out west. Wisconsin proved to be a useful and successful area for abolitionist sentiment to grow.

## SECONDARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

It is very difficult to pull together recent scholarship on an already controversial topic, mostly because ideas clashed between 1840 and 1855 just as they do today. There is no set answer or response to the ardency of slavery and the views that Wisconsin citizens chose to hold for its opposition. Although it was clear that Wisconsin held a firm stance of anti-slavery, there are only a few documented instances where that anti-slavery ideal gets pushed to abolition. The book *Passages to Freedom*, edited by David W. Blight, defines the moments of Northern rebellion against slavery by saying that, "The arrests of fugitive slaves in the North throughout the decade before the Civil War commonly attracted crowds of defenders and always carried with them the threat of violence."<sup>2</sup> Although the mere threat of violence may have been a temporary solution to keep city officials at bay, it certainly was not enough. It is interesting to note however that *Passages to Freedom* does not put all of its focus on the freedom of slaves from southern slaveholders, but also on the ongoing politics of runaways continuing to fight for the right to be free. Without the discussion of politics of the time, this is a virtually

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<sup>2</sup> David W. Blight, ed., *Passages to Freedom* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 169.

impossible fight to grasp, as anti-slavery followers are torn between their hatred of slavery and their uneasiness to live equally with blacks.

Many of the secondary sources also discuss the importance of the Free-Soil party, a party that was founded in 1848 in New York. Although it did not hold with absolute abolitionist ideal, its slogan read, “Free soil, free speech, free labor and free men.”<sup>3</sup> In Larry Gara’s book *A Short History of Wisconsin*, he examines the difference between the less prevalent Liberty Party and the overwhelming support of the Free-Soil Party, explaining that, “The party’s slavery plank was not abolitionist, but simply opposed any further extension of slavery into the territories.”<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder then why the Free-Soil Party dominated the politics of the average citizen in Wisconsin. Wisconsin citizens had been looking for *containment* of slavery, not necessarily complete abolishment.

On a side note, these facts about Free-Soilers seem to clash with my earlier arguments that Wisconsin was the abolitionist stronghold of the North; Free-Soilers were white, and concerned with their freedom as citizens of their respected state, not necessarily freedom in the form of equality for blacks. Although most of Wisconsin’s citizens may have been Free Soilers that reveled in anti-slavery, there were enough abolitionists in Wisconsin to make Wisconsin the state with the most abolitionist sway. Although Ohio would arguably be the state with the greatest amount of fugitive slaves passing through their borders and the state with the most anti-slavery sentiment, they rank lower on the abolitionist scale than Wisconsin mainly because morality was not a prime concern with regards to the ending of slavery. In Richard N. Current’s *The History of*

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<sup>3</sup> Larry Gara, *A Short History of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1962), 100.

<sup>4</sup> Gara, *Short History of Wisconsin*, 100.

*Wisconsin*, he describes Racine as being a “Wisconsin abolitionist stronghold,” going on to say that as Wisconsin was, “Not being upon the direct road to Canada, there were few instances of bondsmen attempting to escape across its territory, and thus giving practical illustration of the iniquity of the slave system.”<sup>5</sup> The author states that because Wisconsin’s position in the Union forfeited a direct and relatively quick route to Canada, fugitives fleeing to the state caused an overwhelming outburst for the prevalence of anti-slavery and abolitionist sentiment.

States’ rights are probably the most controversial of the topics discussed in books about anti-slavery and abolitionism. The politics regarding individual statehood becomes even more complicated in Wisconsin when it became a new state in 1848. A mere two years after statehood, Wisconsin, along with other Union states, were forced to succumb to the Fugitive Slave Law and the so-called Compromise of 1850. Both acts not only stepped on the toes of Northern states, but also diminished individual state laws. In Larry Gara’s *A Short History of Wisconsin*, he discusses at length the politics behind the Compromise with regards to the political parties of the Whig and Democratic parties. Gara points out that, “Both Democratic and Whig politicians hoped that the Compromise of 1850 would permanently remove the slave issue from politics, but the Fugitive Slave Law, a part of the agreement, proved to be very unpopular in the North and kept the agitation alive.”<sup>6</sup> This is important because the slavery issue was never apart from national politics and therefore could never be removed from these politics. It is interesting that Gara does not include a more detailed explanation of the workings of politics outside of the nation’s formal government; examples could have included

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<sup>5</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Story of Wisconsin*. (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1899), 247.

<sup>6</sup> Gara, *Short History of Wisconsin*, 102.

informal party meetings or societies formed to indulge the state with talks about anti-slavery, abolitionism, and the rights of state.

Although the Northern states *chose* to remain slave-free the Fugitive Slave Law forced the realm of slavery into Northern borders without the consent of state citizens. The prime argument against this ordeal was the reasoning that once a fugitive slave crosses into free-borders, s/he is a free person and released from the bonds of slavery. The Southern states response to this was that property was still property regardless of where it ended up, and whoever finds that property without any intention of returning it to the said owner is therefore committing an act of thievery. This was where abolitionists were allowed to take the floor; how can someone exhibit morality if a human being is considered property?

### **WISCONSIN AS THE UNION'S MOST ABOLITIONIST STATE**

In 1526, the Spanish took the first Africans to present-day South Carolina and began selling them as slaves.<sup>7</sup> As one of the oldest slave-holding states (second to Virginia), it was no surprise that South Carolina would be the first state to secede from the Union following an attack on their slave-holding ideals in December of 1860 at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. However, prior to the first state secession, the nation was already being torn apart over the institution of slavery. It can be accurately assumed that many people began asking questions such as, “Who should have slavery, if anyone?” “Where can slavery be banned and where can it be instituted lawfully?” “Can we, as a nation, stop slavery altogether, or must we only be satisfied with the ban that slavery not

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<sup>7</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, *Flight to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1958), 10.

be instituted in any new states and territories?” Even as early as 1840, the nation was asking these questions and looking for solutions. Wisconsin, not yet a state but merely a territory, was already leading the other Union states in the anti-slavery movement.<sup>8</sup>

Abolitionist strongholds in Wisconsin were mainly in the larger cities of Racine and Milwaukee in the southeastern part of the state. White abolitionists from the cities defended fugitive slaves in their talks about anti-slavery, and even went as far as to chastise their own white race. In *The History of Wisconsin, Volume II*, Richard N. Current describes such an occasion: “A delegate from Racine objected to the use of ‘the contemptuous epithet, “niggers,”’ and argued that “Negroes deserved the ‘privileges of freemen’ as much as many of the whites and more than some of them...the Negroes were ‘more intelligent, more civilized, better acquainted with our institutions than the Norwegians.’”<sup>9</sup> Although strong outbursts like these were few and far between, these two large cities seem to have their fair share of radical abolitionism. Current also discusses Milwaukee as not only an abolitionist city, but as a place where free blacks could band together as well: “At a Milwaukee mass meeting a black leader warned his people that they must either accept the risk of re-enslavement or stand together and, with the aid of friendly whites, prevent the enforcement of the law.”<sup>10</sup>

## NEWSPAPERS

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<sup>8</sup> W.C.L.E. Ferslew, *Rock County Gazetteer, Directory and Business Advertiser for 1857-8: Containing a Full Directory of the Cities of Janesville and Beloit, and a List of the Property Holders in the Rural Districts*. (Originally published 1857; New Haven, Connecticut: Research Publications, 1857), 224. [1972?] Microform. No. 37, Reel 15.

<sup>9</sup> Richard N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin, Volume II: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 145.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-8.

Newspapers, a dying source of information in the twenty-first century, were hugely popular during the nineteenth century when there were no radios or televisions. Almost every town ranging from the smallest villages to the largest cities had some form of newspaper that spread the news of western expansion, the intensified political realm, and of course, the issue of slavery. In 1843 in Milwaukee, J.M. Kimball started *The Milwaukee Democrat*, a newspaper dedicated to voicing the strong opinions of anti-slavery.<sup>11</sup> The newspaper, however, was not to be confused with the idea of abolitionism: the thought that blacks should be released from their bondage and to keep them in bondage was an immoral state of being. Anti-slavery supporters were torn between two paths: the first was to oppose slavery because holding other human beings against their will was wrong, while the second path was more of an anti-black sentiment; its followers disliking the black race enough to just want them out of the country. Many anti-slavery followers (non-abolitionists) were not willing to break federal law to aid the lives of the black race. *The Milwaukee Democrat* hosted ideas to its readers that although political reform was needed to reverse the institution of slavery, breaking the federal law, such as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, was unnecessary. This was a strong contrast to that of later newspapers that tended to take up the stance of staunch abolitionism. In 1848, the editor of *The Milwaukee Democrat*, C.C. Sholes, decided to break away from Democratic politics and start his own paper entitled, *The American Freeman*, which was established in Prairieville (now Waukesha), Wisconsin. C.C. Sholes, although not as staunch about the immorality of slavery as some, decided that more intervention on the

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<sup>11</sup> W.C.L.E. Ferslew, *Rock County Gazetteer, Directory and Business Advertiser for 1857-8: Containing a Full Directory of the Cities of Janesville and Beloit, and a List of the Property Holders in the Rural Districts*. (Originally published 1857; New Haven, Connecticut: Research Publications, 1857), 224. [1972?] Microform. No. 38, Reel 15.

issue of slavery was needed. In that same year, Sholes hired Sherman M. Booth to become the editor of the paper. Soon after joining the staff of *The American Freeman*, Booth decided that mere opposition to slavery was not enough to bring the monster of slavery to its knees. He took over the paper from Sholes and moved it back to Milwaukee, renaming it *The Free Democrat* in 1849. These Milwaukee area newspapers were the most significant of the abolitionist papers because their city advantage enabled the news and propaganda to spread quickly. However, other towns and cities had their own newspapers to help spread the word of anti-slavery. In the city of Ozaukee, Wisconsin, a newspaper entitled *The Ozaukee County Times* helped to pass along the details of the infamous Glover escape. Glover, a runaway slave from Missouri who made it north to Racine and was living there freely, was captured and taken to a Milwaukee prison by his owner and other citizens. Outraged, abolitionist and newspaper editor, Sherman Booth along with other abolitionists, stormed the jail and released Joshua. These published details in *The Ozaukee County Times* paid homage to the citizens of Milwaukee who had helped to free the fugitive slave from recapture. A clip from their paper reads:

The spirit which incited and effected the rescue of Glover is the same which incited and effected our national liberties. The revolutionary fathers rose in arms against unjust and oppressive laws...; the citizens of Milwaukee arose in their might against a law which deprives human beings of personal liberty, and tore from its relentless grasp a victim. That spirit, wherever it manifests itself, we honor. We honor the revolutionary fathers, so do we honor the citizens of Milwaukee.<sup>12</sup>

Honorary notices such as these were often displayed following a successful attempt at furthering abolitionist or anti-slavery progress. While these snippets encouraged more

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<sup>12</sup> David W. Blight, ed., *Passages to Freedom* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 170.

attempts to spread abolitionist and anti-slavery sentiments, it further agitated Southern slaveholders concern that these sentiments would build momentum for the abolition of slavery altogether.<sup>13</sup>

The news of anti-slavery continued even following the years of the civil war. Because the civil war was deemed America's great and possibly last adventure, newspapers kept the romanticism of the blue and grey alive. Another Wisconsin paper known as the *Burlington Militant* continued to spread the news about civil war heroism within its respective county, Racine County. Written in 1939 as a sister paper to the *Racine County Militant*, it rehashes the most important parts of Racine's history. The biggest section of the paper concerns the fugitive slave escape of Joshua Glover who was abducted by his former master in Racine. The newspaper also details the ideas of Dr. E.G. Dyer, a secretary of the Burlington Liberty Association who participated in the fight for anti-slavery before the outbreak of the war. As being quoted in a letter that was printed on April 17, 1844 in the *American Freeman*, Dr. Dyer states, "I have been an Anti-Slavery reader for seven years and my path has grown brighter and brighter. I would not swap the great principles of our enterprise for worlds piled on worlds."<sup>14</sup> Dr. Dyer's "brightened anti-slavery path" has no doubt been the result of numerous newspaper accounts circulating stories of fugitive slaves and states standing up for themselves. This newspaper also discusses in length the contributions that men of the city of Burlington made to keep other anti-slavery newspapers going. The *Militant* describes the men that were listed as stockholders in the *American Freeman* and essentially kept the paper from dying, stating, "These men invested their money in this

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Burlington Militant* (Burlington, Wisconsin), 5 June 1939, p. 3.

enterprise in order to keep the paper going, with no expectation of ever getting any return.”<sup>15</sup> This seems enough proof that the typical Wisconsin citizen, although outwardly promoting containment as opposed to abolishment, still wanted the ongoing sentiment of anti-slavery to be distributed statewide. Despite Wisconsin’s seemingly conservative appearance, its appetite for the press and free speech was overwhelming. People could not read enough stories about the Fugitive Slave Law and opposing anti-slavery tactics.

### **ANTI-SLAVERY SENTIMENT (LETTERS, MEETINGS)**

Although it would be pushing the envelope to say that all Wisconsin citizens were anti-slavery and abolitionist, the people that did advocate for the freedom of slaves and their suffrage were bold enough to stand out from the crowd by standing firm on their beliefs. Not all abolitionist Wisconsinites used their sentiments to make a statement; most used them as opportunities for intense discussions that could potentially push for small meetings between villages or towns to discuss the issue of slavery, thus furthering support for the cause.

Hitty Wenzel Potter, a woman originally from Massachusetts, moved with her husband to the Wisconsin Territory in 1842. In a letter to her parents and siblings in Massachusetts dated 26 November 1844, she goes into great detail about Wisconsin’s anti-slavery sentiment. She explains to her family, “Politicks do not rage quite as high here as they do there. I suppose although many are strong party men, they can’t have the chance to vote for president here yet. The Abolitions are the strongest party here I should

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<sup>15</sup> *The Burlington Militant*, p. 4.

think. Some runaway slaves are pursued even into the territory.”<sup>16</sup> Even earlier in the letter, Potter explains her own ideals with the slavery issue, regarding it as a “glaring sin” and that the “U.S. is cursed with far too much slavery already.”<sup>17</sup> Hitty’s Puritanistic New England ideals are very apparent in her letters to Massachusetts, as many of her pages are filled with the morals of Christ and her opposition, although non-radical, ideas about slavery. A clear transportation of ideas can be seen as families from the east coast made their way west.

However, more letters from residents of the Wisconsin Territory seem to push for a greater outreach of the ideals of anti-slavery, and more importantly, abolitionism. In a letter authored by Henry S. Durand of Racine in 1843, he briefly describes anti-slavery around his area. “I will just say that our friend Godding is in town and lectured last evening upon the subject of Anti-Slavery [. . .] The cause meets with considerable favor in this place and a society has been formed.”<sup>18</sup> The small societies that were formed merely by discussion about slavery and morality were sometimes needed to make a larger statement in the event of aiding fugitive slaves north. Many of these small societies lectured at churches and around various towns, promoting the moral obligation that Northerners had to fugitive slaves and to themselves as members of their (then) respected territory turned state. Emory M. Hamilton, an abolitionist from Milton, Wisconsin, was no exception. He along with others from south-central Wisconsin formed such a society in 1856. They called themselves The Kansas Settlers Association, but seemed to be

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<sup>16</sup> Hitty Wenzel Potter to her Parents, brothers and sisters, 26 November 1844, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

<sup>17</sup> Potter, 26 November 1844.

<sup>18</sup> Henry S. Durand, Racine, to his Uncle, 19 December 1843, Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Racine, Wisconsin.

known more locally as the Wisconsin Pioneer Company. The group's main goal was to go to "Bleeding Kansas" and advocate the continuation and spread of slavery to a newly founded state. It is very clear that this society was not the only group trying to control the spread of slavery. Looking through the group's record book, the reader can see the undeniable importance of morality within the men who made up the Wisconsin Pioneer Company. For example, one very strict rule among the Company was that no liquor was to be allowed or tolerated. The record book clearly states that using liquor is a, "breach of good morals, and derogatory to the character of the Association."<sup>19</sup> The Company was also strict about personal conduct and was very professional about dealing with mishaps between members or incidents that an inside member might do to an average citizen. The book elaborates much like a state constitution, explaining that, "Any persons charged with disorderly conduct shall be scanned by a committee appointed by the branch association to which said person must belong, and if found guilty, may be expelled by a two-thirds vote of the members thereof."<sup>20</sup> The Company's decree is a valuable clue that sets their group apart from the rest of the nation's abolitionists; later, the staunch abolitionist Sherman Booth will break a national law instead of working to remedy the faults of it. The Company's rules emphasize that while in their work of abolishing slavery, their own morality will not be sacrificed. This gives a certain feeling of Quakerism which aims to righteously 'cleanse the world' without becoming sullied while doing so. Hamilton's band of abolitionists gives the feeling of conservative abolitionism; although they fundamentally broke the law, they did not use violent means or force. However, they remained active participators although not to the extent of many radical

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<sup>19</sup> Emory M. Hamilton, 1856, Record Book, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton, 1856.

abolitionists. However, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 brought out the true tenacity of staunch abolitionists that looked for a solution beyond words, negations, and meetings. Although there were groups with men like Emory Hamilton who wished to remain moral and within the rights of the law, others chose to sacrifice their own grace to make a statement.

### **FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW of 1850**

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was an official doctrine that decreed that all law-enforcement officials of the Northern states were required, by law, to help in the recapture of said fugitive slaves. The Law had been put into effect as part of the Compromise of 1850, which stated that slavery would be banned from new states joining the Union but could continue within its current borders. However, the Fugitive Slave Law put direct federal intervention on the freedom of the states. The law stated that anyone aiding a fugitive was breaking the law and would then be fined or imprisoned upon said conviction. It also declared that caught fugitive slaves would not be able to have a trial by jury but would immediately be turned over to their masters.

Since the Fugitive Slave Law violated Northern states' right of excluding slavery from their borders, many took it upon themselves to demand more states' rights and less federal intervention. Wisconsin was such a state and eventually, in 1859, deemed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 unconstitutional and declared it exempt from Wisconsin law. Wisconsinites were appalled that the reigns of slavery still took precedence over their own rights and laws of the state. For years, the people of Wisconsin were aiding those trying to make it to freedom in Canada, and an unjust law applied to the citizens of

Wisconsin was not going to end that aid. In the same letter to her relatives in Massachusetts, Hitty Wenzel Potter makes references to such fugitive slave escapes. She describes the specific escape of a black woman who hid in an old store for three days while her master searched for her. “The slave was a lady so white that she would not be supposed to have any coloured blood...finally she was conveyed to Detroit by land and passed into Canada her master hunted several days after she was actually gone.”<sup>21</sup>

Although there were many instances of runaway slaves in states such as Ohio that led directly from the South to Canada, Wisconsin’s out-of-the-way location made each fugitive slave instance a big event.

### **GLOVER CASE**

Perhaps the biggest event in Wisconsin’s abolitionist history is the escape of Joshua Glover, a fugitive slave from Missouri who had fled to Racine in 1852. In March 1854, Glover was arrested in Racine, Wisconsin while playing cards with two black friends and taken to a jail in Milwaukee. He was confronted by five men, including his former master from St. Louis, B.W. Garland, one United States deputy marshal, and the three men who were respective citizens of Racine. The deputy marshal was under orders via The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 to lead B.W. Garland to Joshua Glover and in turn, arrest Glover with intentions to turn him over to Garland. After being brutally beaten by all five men in a skirmish leading to arrest, Glover was shackled in irons and thrown into an open wagon.

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<sup>21</sup> Hitty Wenzel Potter to her relatives, 26 November 1844.

From Racine, Glover was taken by wagon to Milwaukee, and for the sake of discreetness, the five captors stayed away from the main roads. Glover was kicked and beaten during the entire journey by Garland; the journey from Racine to Milwaukee lasted all night. They finally reached the jail at the break of dawn and threw Glover into a cell. Later that day after catching word of a fugitive slave in jail, Sherman Booth, the editor of the *Free Democrat*, finally displayed his abolitionist thought through more than mere words.

Sherman Booth was born in New York in 1812. He studied at Yale University and upon graduation, Booth decided to teach. He quickly discovered his passion for public speaking and denouncing the realm of slavery and slaveholders. After moving to Wisconsin in 1848, he decided to work for C.C. Sholes, editing *The American Freeman*. It was a few years after he moved *The Freeman* (now the *Free Democrat*) to Milwaukee in 1854 that would define Booth's importance with abolitionist politics; freeing Glover would be the highest and most significant point of his life.

In 1850, Booth banded together with other staunch Republicans of Wisconsin (both abolitionists and anti-slavery men alike) and appealed for more legislature that would fight against outcomes that, in the future, would occur with the Dred Scott case and the Fugitive Slave Law. However, some Republicans (mainly non-abolitionists) became uneasy when the Democratic party would print things such as, "The Negro Worshippers." These Republicans took steps to then disassociate themselves with abolitionist ideals and members of their party.<sup>22</sup> It is unfortunate to see that anti-slavery followers stepped away from the pressure of obtaining freedom for blacks merely

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<sup>22</sup> Current, *History of Wisconsin Volume II*, 261-2.

because of a little mud-slinging between political parties; however, it shows the threat and impact of the Republican party's abolitionist ideals.

Booth's spirit for the abolitionist cause did not stop there. He, along with other Free-Soil men such as James H. Paine and Franklin J. Blair, voiced their opinions that Glover deserved a writ of *habeas corpus* and a trial by jury, even though under the Fugitive Slave Law it was deemed impossible. Although the state judge agreed to issue the writ, the Milwaukee sheriff and the United States district judge would not comply. More security was positioned at Glover's cell. After distributing printed handbills from his newspaper office that read, "Freemen, to the rescue!", Booth gathered many supporters at the courthouse. Their support would be used later in the release of Glover. The next morning, Booth, together with five thousand angry blacks and whites, stormed the jail, released Glover and sent him to Canada.<sup>23</sup> Just days afterwards, Booth printed a saucy article in the *Free Democrat* that proclaimed, "We send greetings to the Free States of the Union, that, in Wisconsin, the Fugitive Slave Law is repealed! The first attempt to enforce the law, in this State, has signally, gloriously failed!"<sup>24</sup> A few days after Glover's escape Booth was arrested while giving a speech in Ripon, Wisconsin. He was then tried at the federal court level for aiding in the escape of the fugitive Glover. Although Justice Smith called for a writ of *habeas corpus* with regards to Booth and deemed the Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutional on the grounds that it failed to have a jury trial which violated the due process of law, the remaining judges on the bench upheld his decision. This was most likely on the grounds that the Fugitive Slave Law

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<sup>23</sup> Thwaites, *Story of Wisconsin*, 250.

<sup>24</sup> Gara, *Short History of Wisconsin*, 101.

stated that fugitive slaves would not be given the right of trial by jury, nor did they have the right to testify.<sup>25</sup> In compliance with southern slave holders, the Fugitive Slave Law, “authorized federal commissioners, not state judges, to process escapees, and it obliged every citizen to assist in capturing runaways.”<sup>26</sup> Because Booth defied the law by aiding a runaway slave, he was sentenced to imprisonment and a fine by the other judges on the bench. At this point, the state Supreme Court issued another call for *habeas corpus* and Booth was released.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, Booth’s numerous trials were due to the resistance of state officials (such as the judges on the state supreme court) to send the court ruling to the United States Supreme court. This was the states’ way of shunning federal authority and law.<sup>28</sup> It has been written that Sherman Booth went through nineteen trials, was thrown in jail three times and spent about 35,000 dollars in aid for his case.<sup>29</sup> Booth was only freed after a pardon from President Buchanan. Had Buchanan not been a Democrat, there is no telling how long Booth would have remained behind bars.

A few years after the infamous Glover case, Booth still remained an anti-slavery, if not abolitionist, hero. When the Civil War broke out, Booth began publishing a magazine entitled *Daily Life* in Milwaukee to which his wife contributed many articles. Even after the war when Booth moved to Chicago, he continued to work as a newspaper

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<sup>25</sup> Blight, ed., *Passages to Freedom*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis Baker Usher, *Wisconsin, Its Story and Biography*, 1848-1913 (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), 117.

<sup>28</sup> Current, *History of Wisconsin Volume II*, 235.

<sup>29</sup> Sherman M. Booth, 1812-1904, Papers, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee.

man, contributing articles to *The Chicago Tribune*. His staunch views on abolitionism and the fight for states' rights followed him until his death.

## CONCLUSION

Joshua Glover's capture was not the only thing that prompted more abolitionist ideals in Racine, Wisconsin, but it did spark frenzy in the nation that opposition to slavery was not enough to end it. Although Sherman Booth's prominent display of radical abolitionism made many people re-evaluate the stance of slavery, it did not sway as many Wisconsinites to abolitionist thought as he may have wished. Many Wisconsinites decided in favor of more states' rights which were also achieved through Booth's trials. People were much more interested in keeping slavery at bay and *controlling* the boundaries of slavery as opposed to stopping it completely.<sup>30</sup> This is fairly evident in the Compromise of 1850, although with the direct imposition of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, many Wisconsinites were apt to reject the entirety of 1850 politics.

Abolitionism was not only a product of debating politics—it was also a product of events unfolding merely from observation. Hitty Wenzel Potter and Henry S. Durand are two such people who recorded key events in their lives that sparked anti-slavery thought. Their letters to friends and relatives describe detailed accounts of fugitive slave escapes and town meetings complete with lectures on the evils of slavery. Although Wisconsin was not the leading state in fugitive slave escapes, it was the leading state in abolitionism and anti-slavery ideals.

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<sup>30</sup> Gara, *Short History of Wisconsin*, 101.

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