

Wisconsin's Defiance of Federal Tyranny

On the evening of March 10, 1854, two wagons carrying two federal marshals and five other men made their way to a small cabin that was the home of Joshua Glover. Glover was a runaway slave who had been living in Racine, Wisconsin for about two years. He was known to be a skilled carpenter and was employed at the local sawmill.

The federal marshals had a warrant from a federal judge for the arrest of Glover. They burst into the cabin and arrested Glover, but only after they beat him bloody. They manacled him and placed him in one of the wagons. The wagon carrying Glover drove six hours through the night up to Milwaukee and Glover was placed in the Milwaukee County Jail.

Abolitionists soon gathered in Racine and telegraphed word up to abolitionists in Milwaukee as to what had happened to Glover. Sherman Booth, a newspaper editor and avid abolitionist, sprung to action. He printed up handbills and rode his horse up and down Milwaukee streets. As he rode and dispensed of the handbills, he yelled at the top of his lungs – “A man’s liberty is at stake – rally at the Courthouse at 2:00 p.m.” To Booth’s amazement, over 5000 people gathered. Speeches began, committees were formed, and resolutions were written up. A Writ of Habeas Corpus was written by lawyer and abolitionist Byron Paine; approved by a county judge; and taken to the federal authorities. The federal marshals were instructed by a federal judge to ignore the Writ. A battle between jurisdictions had begun.

About 4:00 p.m., most of the people left the Courthouse area, only several hundred remaining. But at about 5:00 p.m., the Racine Sheriff arrived with about a hundred men by boat. They walked lockstep to the Courthouse and jail. This aroused Milwaukeeans and soon thousands were assembled once again.

Again, the Writ was asserted and again rebuffed by federal authorities. But some in the crowd, concerned for Glover, decided to take action of a different kind. A burly blacksmith, James Angove, grabbed a six foot wooden beam from the construction site of the St. John Cathedral, and he and others battered down the jail door.

Glover, still bloodied around the head, was brought to a flatbed wagon. As he stood there looking at the crowd of thousands, he uttered just two words – “Glory, Hallelujah.” Glover was taken to Waukesha and hid at a farm. Placed on the underground railroad; he made it back to the Port of Racine two weeks later; was put on a boat; made it to Canada; and died of old age 26 years later. The federal government, angered that the slave had gotten away, ordered the indictment and arrest of Sherman Booth as the ringleader.

In an historic act, however, the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the Wisconsin Legislature defied the U.S. Supreme Court and the federal government by interposing on behalf of Booth and declaring the unjust federal Fugitive Slave Act to be “*without authority, void, and of no force*” in the state of Wisconsin.

And this is what our state officials need to do in our day on behalf of the preborn.

Matthew Trewhella is the pastor of Mercy Seat Christian Church (<http://MercySeat.net>), founder of Missionaries to the Preborn (<http://MissionariesToThePreborn.com>), and author of the book *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates* (<http://DefyTyrants.com>). He and his wife Clara have eleven children and reside in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area.