

In Search of Joshua Glover

By Anna Lardinois



Illustration by Bervick Simien

Annie carefully read each ad in *The Christian Recorder*. The old woman bent over the paper, her failing eyesight making it difficult to read the small print. She struggled in the dim light of her dingy room, but she continued reading, her gnarled finger tracing each line on the page.

So many Joshuas! Her heartbeat faster every time she saw the name in an ad. Some of the ads were looking for a missing Joshua. Other ads were from Joshuas looking for their families.

But no ads from a Joshua looking for a mother named Annie.

Although it is unknown if Joshua Glover's mother ever placed an ad searching for her son, Joshua Glover was a real person who escaped slavery in 1852. Parts of this story are based on true events.

Annie longed to see her son again. She ached to wrap her arms around Joshua and tell him she thought about him every day. When she woke in the morning, she wondered if Joshua slept well the night before. When she went to bed, she prayed her son was safe and healthy.

Joshua was always on her mind, and in her heart.

Annie lost track of Joshua when he was sold at a slave auction on New Year's Day in 1850. The only thing she knew was that Joshua was bought by a man named Bennami Garland who had a large farm near St. Louis.

Annie started searching for her son as soon as she was freed. Joshua couldn't be found in the ads seeking lost families, but his name appeared on the front page of every newspaper in the country in 1854.

Because enslaved people were not allowed to read, Annie had no idea her beloved son bravely defied the law and fled the country.

Her son's heroic story began when he was enslaved on Garland's farm.

Garland made Joshua work very hard. He did not feed the people he enslaved well and treated them harshly. Joshua was miserable at Garland's farm, so he decided to escape.

Joshua knew running away was dangerous. He knew people trying to escape slavery faced torture, or even death, if they were caught. He was willing to risk death for a chance at freedom.

In 1852, Joshua fled Garland's farm. He traveled on foot, hiding in the shadows to avoid being seen. He walked north for 350 miles, until he arrived in Racine, Wisconsin. He made the town his home.

He had no way to let his mother know where he was. It was illegal to teach enslaved people to read or write so he could not get a letter to her. Even if he could have, he did not know if Annie had been sold since he had last seen her, so he had no idea where she lived or if she had a new name.

Despite having a mother who loved him, he was alone in the world.

The newly free man changed his name to Joshua Glover. He quickly got a job at a sawmill and moved into a small cabin of his own.

In Racine, Joshua lived the life of a free man. He still worked very hard, and he did not have many possessions, but he could finally do the things he longed to do: rest when he was tired, eat when he was hungry, and sing when his heart felt joy.

Joshua may have lived as a free man in a free state, but in the eyes of the government, he was still the property of Bennami Garland.

The Fugitive Slave Act was the law of the land. The law stated that an enslaved person was always the property of the owner, regardless of whether that person lived in a state where slavery was legal or not. Joshua knew he could at any time be captured and forced into slavery again.

Garland was determined to get his property back. He hunted for Joshua until he found him in Racine.

It was a Friday night in 1854. Joshua and some of his friends from the sawmill were playing cards in Joshua's cabin. The friends heard a knock at the cabin door.

It all happened so fast and before Joshua had time to think.

Suddenly, the door flew open and Bennami Garland burst into the cabin with a U.S. Marshal. Garland was there to reclaim his property. In that moment, Joshua was, once again, enslaved.

Even though Joshua did not resist being taken into custody, he was still badly beaten. When he was thrown into a Milwaukee jail, he was bruised, bloody, and covered in dirt. The marshal left Joshua in that condition for the remainder of the weekend.

Milwaukee was a city full of abolitionists. Abolitionists are people who opposed slavery. These people were angry when they discovered a person fleeing slavery was held in their jail. When they found out that Joshua was not treated humanely in jail, their anger grew.

Within days, 5,000 abolitionists surrounded the jail where the sheriff held Joshua. They believed slavery was morally wrong and the Fugitive Slave Act was unconstitutional. So, they decided to do something about it.

The crowd smashed through the door of the jail with a battering ram. A surge of abolitionists rushed through the broken door and into the jail. They freed Joshua Glover from his cell and hid him in the crowd.

The abolitionists planned to help Joshua escape to Canada where he could finally live as a free man. They hid him for weeks in back rooms, basements, and barns until they could get him on a steamer ship and away from Garland and the Fugitive Slave Act forever.

Their plan was a success! Joshua arrived in Ontario in the summer of 1854.

He spent the remainder of his life in Canada and lived as a free man. He worked on a farm, married, and lived as free men all over the world do.

FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW EXCITEMENT IN MILWAUKIE, WISCONSIN.

MEETING OF CITIZENS—THE JAIL BROKEN, AND THE ALLEGED FUGITIVE RESCUED BY A MOB—THE MILITARY ORDERED OUT. The greatest excitement was caused on Saturday morning by the announcement that a fugitive slave had been arrested about four miles this side of Racine, by Deputy United States Marshal, C. C. Cotton, and four other men, one of them named B. S. Garland, the alleged owner of the fugitive, and another a constable of Racine—in all, five white men—and brought to this city, and placed, handcuffed, in our jail. The particulars of the transaction are these :—

The colored man's name is Joshua Glover, and he is claimed as the runaway slave of S. Garland, of St. Louis county, Missouri. He is alleged to have run away in 1852.

Glover was in the employ of St. Clair and Rice, in a mill near Racine. On Friday night, while seated in his shanty, five men broke open the door suddenly, rushed in upon him, and felled him to the ground. They then handcuffed him, took him into a double buggy, with nothing on but his pantaloons and shirt, and drove off north, and after having lost the way, at last brought him to Milwaukee county jail. Here he was lodged in a cell, handcuffed. Our deputy jailer, with commendable feelings of humanity, took off the handcuffs and treated him with care and kindness.

As soon as the matter got wind, the greatest excitement prevailed. A large number flocked to the jail, hundreds of men were aroused, and declared that he should not be taken from the city. Lawyers without number were busy at work, searching through the sections of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Revised Statutes were opened in a number of law offices to the chapter on habeas corpus, and everything that could be done within the law for the release from custody of Glover, was resorted to.

Some man rode through from Racine on horseback, and gave the first information that our jail contained a fugitive—that one of the cells had been polluted by the blood of a fugitive slave. We, with others, went to the jail, and found the fugitive in a cell. He was called into the passage: and what a sight was there! The man was cut in two places on the head; the front of his shirt and vest were soaking and stiff in his own blood.

The man tells us he had been in this State about two years, and that he was at work for the persons we have named above, and that they now owe him about fifty dollars, and he was sitting in his shanty when the men came in, one placed a revolver to his head; he put up his hand to push it away, when he was knocked down senseless, and removed to the wagon. The man or men swore that if he shouted or made the least noise, they would kill him instantly.

Excerpt from "Fugitive Slave Law Excitement in Milwaukee, Wisconsin," The Liberator (Boston, MA) March 24, 1854

By the time Annie started searching the ads for her son, he had been living in Canada for nine years. The broken-hearted mother would never find her son in the advertisements placed by grieving families longing to find each other. But she never stopped looking for him.

Annie could not afford to purchase every issue of the newspaper that contained ads for missing families. She shared the cost with the members of her church. Together, they bought copies of newspapers. Each week they'd take a section of the paper and begin to search the ads for missing family members.

When the church members first gathered, most of them did not know how to read. The few who did know how to read taught the others. They started with the words that might help them their lost loved ones. They learned words like "mother," "son," and the names of the cities where they had been enslaved. Their vocabulary grew each week as they studied the ads together.

The first word Annie learned to read was "Joshua."

The congregants would pray, and sometimes cry, as they read the ads. They prayed to find their loved ones. They prayed for the strangers in the ads who were searching for their families. And they cried in grief from the sadness and longing in each ad they read.

Placing an ad in the newspaper was expensive. Some members of Annie's church managed to scrape together enough money to place their own ads seeking lost family members. Annie was never able to do that.

Like many people freed from slavery, Annie had very little money. She tried saving money to create her own ad searching for Joshua, but she barely had enough money to take care of her basic needs. She prayed Joshua was doing better than she was and was able to place an ad for her.

For Annie, every meeting at the church was the same. She would arrive with a full heart, certain that this was the week she would find her boy. She began reading the ads with excitement, quickly scanning each ad for the names Joshua and Annie. By the end of the meetings, Annie read the ads very slowly. She did not want to reach the end of the page and find no messages from her son.

She sometimes brought the worn newspapers home with her. She would read the pages over and over again, hoping to find an ad she overlooked the first time she read through them. The outcome was always the same—none of the ads were from her son.

She did this week after week for the rest of her life.

As she searched for Joshua, she had no idea the bravery of her son helped all enslaved people. After Joshua was freed from the Milwaukee jail, the Wisconsin Supreme Court looked at his case and eventually ruled the Fugitive Slave Act to be unconstitutional in 1855. The law was eventually repealed in 1864.

Annie died never knowing that the son she longed to hug one final time changed the course of U.S. history.

About the author:

Anna Lardino is a writer who specializes in regional history and lore. She is the author of ten books, including *Shipwrecks of the Great Lakes*, *Storied and Scandalous Wisconsin*, and a number of *Spooky America* titles.

About the artist:

Dallas based illustrator and business owner, Bervick Simien, has been drawing ever since the moment he could pick up a pencil. Not knowing that the gift he has had all his life would ultimately become his profession four years ago. Ranging from children's books, logos, single illustrations, and comics, Bervick is nothing short of versatile. Through his work, he strives to create a world where art speaks to the mind, hearts, and souls of the people. He is on Instagram @BervickSimien

References:

Jackson, Ruby West and McDonald, Walter T. "Finding Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave." *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume 90, Number 3, Spring 2007. Accessed 1 February 2023. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wmh/id/43556>

"In Pursuit of Freedom: The Life of Joshua Glover." *Heritage Toronto*, July 30, 2021. Accessed 1 February 2023 <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore-learn/joshua-glover-freedom-slavery/>

Supplementary material:

Freedom Heights (A Song for Joshua Glover)

https://www.soulpepper.ca/watch/awakenings?fbclid=IwAR3IKzFjDix2l5o9R-uvVBu_Q9idU3tcBBTHjrAu-VpDw3fuP9ErYzzCsVI

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