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This is a biographical sketch of Elijah Madison, a nineteenth century resident of St. Louis County. The source material for this sketch was taken from the collections of the Missouri History Museum Library and Archives.

Official records indicate that Elijah Madison was probably born in Virginia around 1841 though other traditions point to Missouri as his place of birth. Regardless, he was born a slave of the Coleman family. The Colemans, like so many other Virginia families of the early nineteenth century, decided to leave their home in the Old Dominion and move west to the less crowded western states. Here land was more plentiful for those who sought to prosper. The family settled in western St. Louis County in the area near present Babler State Park and established a hemp plantation.

Elijah Madison worked on the Coleman Plantation until the Civil War brought the opportunity of freedom. In 1864, he left the plantation and traveled to St. Louis to enlist in the United States Colored Troops, the Union Army units set aside for African-American recruits. Madison was placed in the 68<sup>th</sup> Infantry, USCT. The 68<sup>th</sup> was one of the most active USCT units during the war. It was sent south to Memphis, Tennessee to defend the city then ordered on to participate in Union General Andrew Smith's expedition to Tupelo, Mississippi. Under Smith, the 68<sup>th</sup> was assigned to push Confederate forces under General Nathan Bedford Forrest out of Mississippi. This was an extremely dangerous mission since Forrest's hatred of black troops was widely known along with his ruthless policy of killing all black soldiers without quarter. Smith was victorious and the 68<sup>th</sup> saw further action in Florida and Alabama. The unit's most notable fight took place in Mobile, Alabama when the troops successfully took Fort Blakely after a bitter fight. After the occupation of Mobile, the unit went to New Orleans and later saw some of the last action of the war in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas.

Madison mustered out of the 68<sup>th</sup> USCT in 1866 in St. Louis. He chose to return to west St. Louis County. There he married and established himself as a farmer. Through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he continued to live near the area he had once worked as a slave. Listings in the 1893 and 1896 St. Louis County Directories note that Elijah Madison lived on Wild Horse Creek Road and received his mail at the Orrville, Missouri Post Office on Eatherton Road. Later, perhaps due to his advancing age, he moved closer to the city of St. Louis and settled in Elmwood Park. There he died in 1911 but was buried near his old home in West County.

For nearly twenty-five years Elijah Madison lived as a slave. When the chance to be free arrived in the form of war, he could have simply left for safer country. But Madison chose to fight for others who were still enslaved. Despite the harshness of the war, especially for blacks fighting against those who sought their continued enslavement, he enlisted and saw some of the most brutal warfare this country has known. Then like most veterans, he came home and tried to make a living. While Madison may not have excelled to become a prominent individual in the pages of history he contributed far more than most toward making America a more just and equal nation.

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