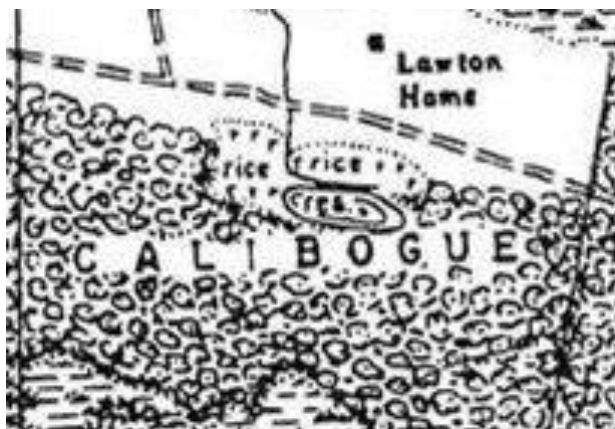


JOSIAH ELMORE



Born: 1808 in SC

Died: After 1880

**Map of Hilton Head Island
Before 1861
Compiled from deeds by
Fred Hack, Sr.**

Josiah Elmore was born about 1808 in South Carolina. He was an illiterate freedman who was known as the unofficial “Governor of Lawton” because of his kind and helpful nature and his ability to organize and get things done.¹ He was the most important person to greet Eliza Ann Summers and Julia Benedict the day after their arrival with a genuine offer of assistance. He became their guardian, protector, helper, and true friend.² In a letter dated February 12, 1867, to her sister Sarah, Eliza told of Josiah’s kindness:

Mr. Elmore that colored man who is so kind to us has sent us in three braces of robins. He gets up early in the morning and shoots and dresses them for our breakfast. He is so very kind to us. Today he has made Julie and I each of us a present of a stool of his own manufacture just because he heard us say once we wished we could have some.³

Although Josiah was never appointed as a teacher by any agency since he himself was illiterate, he certainly was a teacher to Eliza Ann and Julia. He taught them to ride a horse on the beach, row a boat, fish for their dinner, and gather and prepare oysters. He took them on outings and had friends row them in one of his three boats to

¹ Martin, Josephine W, ed. “Dear Sister”: Letters Written on Hilton Head Island 1867. Beaufort, SC : Book Co, Inc 1977. [Letters written by teacher Eliza Ann Summers], xxii..

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p 22.

JOSIAH ELMORE

Long Island beach for the day.⁴ He used the tried and true teaching method of offering rewards for accomplishment. When he first offered Eliza Ann his small pony to try taking short rides, she was discouraged by the reins breaking and the pony stubbornly turning around heading for home. Her next outing was aborted due to a storm on the horizon. But Josiah was persistent, encouraging her to try and try again to reach the beach. After she had finally accomplished a solo ride on the pony, he rewarded her before she left Hilton Head with use of his large horse for an 11-mile ride on the beach by herself.⁵

Mr. Elmore and Eliza Ann had become such close friends that they were truly co-dependent. On March 19, 1867, she wrote her sister Sarah:

[he] wants me to tell my people at home not to worry about us as long as he is here to take care of us. As long as he has anything we want; he is perfectly willing to give us half. He wants me to tell Mother that if I come home, she must be sure to let me come back.⁶

Josiah worked as a farmer, fisherman, transporter and entrepreneur. He helped to encourage attendance at the school and to maintain discipline in the classroom. In the 1870 U.S. Census, Josiah and his daughter Cornelia were living in Hilton Head. He claimed he was sixty-two years old, still illiterate but owning \$175 of personal property. On June 9, 1880, according to the US Census, he claimed he was a 'mulatto' and was a widower living on Hilton Head Island. His daughter, Cornelia, who was born 1855, was living with him as well as his granddaughter Guardina Elmore, one year old.⁷ Josiah Elmore died after June 9, 1880 on Hilton Head Island as a successful farmer with his own land.

The only record of Josiah's existence besides the letters of Eliza Ann Summers written from Lawton Plantation on Hilton Head during 1867, is from U.S. Census records. Thankfully, Eliza Ann left us great and warm descriptions of the person and character of the former slave Josiah Elmore and his importance to the existence of the schools at Lawton during the Reconstruction Era.

⁴ Ibid, pp 60-62.

⁵ Ibid, pp 44-45.

⁶ Ibid, p 49.

⁷ <http://www.ancestry.com> US Census 1870 and 1880 for Hilton Head, SC.