

Historic Evidence for Rattlesnakes (*Massasauga*, *Sistrurus catenatus*, and the Timber Rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*) from Mitchell County in Northeastern Iowa and from Mower County in Southeastern Minnesota

At one time the massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus*) were found extensively in the southern half of Iowa, its range extending northward into southeastern Minnesota along the Mississippian floodplain, the only place it has been known to have occurred in Minnesota. Extant populations are not currently verified from Minnesota, and only four populations are known from Iowa (Mills County in the southwest; Cedar River in Muscatine County; lower and upper Wapsipinicon River in Clinton/Scott Counties and Bremer County). Evidence for massasauga is presented from Mitchell County north of their known historic range along the Wapsipinicon River in southern Chickasaw County. A Mitchell County 1884 history accurately describes snakes and indicates there were “plenty of massasauga” but only a few timber rattlesnakes. A second account by Hamlin Garland accurately describes massasauga in the 1870s from moist spots on a prairie northeast of Osage on the Cedar River watershed. More pioneer rattlesnake accounts were uncovered as was a Mitchell County death record of an 1899 [should be 1889 - JFM] fatal rattlesnake bite of an elderly farmer from the northeast corner of the county (Wayne Township). Early accounts from typical massasauga habitat were found in adjacent Mower County, Minnesota. An 1874 newspaper report from the Lyle area, close to the Cedar River in southwest Mower County, describes seven rattlesnakes found under oat bundles during harvest. Another pioneer account from the 1850s or 1860s, which includes a non lethal snake bite, refers to a prairie along Rose Creek (which drains into the Cedar River) as “seeded down” to rattlesnakes. The first 30 years of Mower County death records (1870-1899) have three reports (Windom, Adam, and LeRoy Townships) of snake bite fatalities (one as a rattlesnake) all in the 1870s and all of children ten years old or younger. The only lethal snakes in the county would have been rattlers.

This a copy of the abstract of the talk I [James Mahaffy] gave in 2007 at the 87th annual meeting of the [American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists](#) July 16th in St. Louis.