Rattlesnake report 126
Reported by James Mahaffy

July 23, 2007

I found this early account of a rattlesnake bite in Pottawattamie County in the cemetery page for Big groove Cemetery on the Pottawamie County Geneological Society Page.  
http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~iapcgs/CemBigGrove.htm

This cemetery was known as the "Fetter Cemetery" for many years as it was situated on land owned by J. L. Fetter. The 1885 Plat Book of Pottawattamie County listed it as "Big Grove Cemetery." This cemetery is located 2 miles west of Oakland on G42, lying on the south side of the road back in the field in Section 10, Township 75 N, Range 40 W.

According to Mr. G. G. Harris, Sr., a long time Trustee of Belknap Township, a young man from the nearby stage coach stop was working in the hayfield when he was bitten by a rattlesnake. Since the nearest doctor was in Council Bluffs, the young man died before he could receive medical attention. Mr. Fetter thought this small knoll was such a beautiful spot that the unknown young man should be buried here.

Analysis:

The speed of death makes it likely that the boy was bitten by either a timber or possibly a prairie rattle snake.  Massasauga are less lethal (healthy grownup generally do not die of their bites)

June 23, 2008 The name and date of the death were not given in the above account, but I received an e-mail from Doug Atkinson telling me that one of his family had died of a rattlesnake bite. Since it was near the same town and about the same time, I assume the death was likely that of eleven year old Frank (Frankie) Atkinson, who died in 1876.  However the cemeteries don’t match but I am checking with some of the genealogy folks in Belkamp township.  I assume Big Grove Cemetery burials were moved to Oak Lawn cemetery (in a section called Big Grove). I am checking with some of the local genealogist to see if they know the history of the two cemeteries. I will modify this report when I find out.

For now I am assuming that both the cemetery and the Atkinson bite are of the same individual, Frankie Atkinson.

Doug Atkinson said that he learned most of this information from a Atkinson family history written by Stella Mary (Carse) Thompson (1900-1973).