

**THE COLES COUNTY AFFRAY.****HOW IT ORIGINATED.****A PRECONCERTED SCHEME BY THE  
COPPERHEADS.**

[From Our Own Correspondent.]

Essex House, }  
MATTOON, Coles Co., Ill., April 1, 1864. }

I have just returned from Charleston, where the great riot took place on Monday last, by which eight persons were killed—all of whom, with the exception of two, were good Union men. Charleston is the county seat of Coles county, situated on the Terre Haute and Alton Railroad, twelve miles east of Mattoon. It is, to use the vernacular here, "a right smart place," and contains about 2,500 inhabitants. It boasts several stores, saloons, a large public hall and the Court House. The last is situate on an open square, in the highest part of the town, and it was in the Court House yard where the fray first commenced. The Court House is a large brick building, the front part of which is two stories high, fronting towards the North. On the East and West sides of the square, about two rods from the Court House, is a small brick building used as lawyers' offices; while immediately opposite these are the entrances to the court room.

On Monday morning last, numerous squads of the copperheads came riding into town, armed with revolvers, while along with them came several wagons, in which, as the sequel shows, arms were concealed. There were two reasons for the outpouring of the cops—the opening of the County Court, and the announcement that John R. Eden, M. C., would address his secesh constituents. There were a few of the Fifty-fourth Illinois in town, preparing to go to Mattoon, where the regiment was ordered to rendezvous, but were unarmed, save about half a dozen, who had revolvers. About 9 or 10 o'clock that morning, one Wm. G. Hart, formerly acting Provost Marshal, had a difficulty with a Copperhead, in which the latter came out second best. He went and told his story to his brethren, and they seeing that the soldiers were very few and unarmed, determined after consultation, to clean them out. In order to do this one Nelson Wells, a big burly "butternut" was commissioned to set the ball rolling. Acting under this order, he went stalking around like Paddy at Donnybrook fair, asking for some one to tread on his coat tail. In the mean time the court had been opened by Judge Constable, and John O'Hair, the Sheriff of Coles county, was attending to the duties of his office. Hon. (?) John R. Eden, however, anticipating what was coming and not wishing to criminate himself, did not attempt to deliver his oration, but quietly started off on foot about half-past ten, accompanied by one Schofield, a leading Copperhead and a member of the K. G. Cs. It is asserted by some that he has gone to Washington, and will not show himself here for some time.

About 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Oliver Sallee, of the 54th Illinois, went up to Wells and tapped him on the shoulder, at the same time asking him if there were any copperheads about. Wells replied, "Yes, d—n you. I am one," and drawing his revolver, fired. This was the signal; the reverberations of this shot had hardly ceased, when the Copperheads commenced firing indiscriminately among the soldiers and citizens. Colonel Mitchell, of the 54th Ill., was in the county clerk's office at the time, and immediately rushed out to learn what was going on. His appearance was the signal for the firing of dozens of pistols at him, and although his clothes were riddled with bullets, he escaped miraculously, having only received two very slight flesh wounds. Major York, surgeon of the regiment, was in the drug store opposite the west side of the Court House, and hearing the shots, ran across the street. He had hardly entered the Court House door before several shots were fired. One scoundrel, who turns out to be Green Hanks, a constable in Paris, and deputy sheriff under O'Hair, stepped up behind the doctor, and placing the muzzle of a revolver to his back, fired. The unfortunate man fell dead without uttering a word. In the meantime Judge Constable had adjourned the Court, and cleared out of town, while Sheriff O'Hair abandoned his shrievalty, and took up his position as one of the leaders of the insurgents. They then ran to their wagons, taking out their guns and retreating behind the small brick building in the court yard. Here they fired whenever they saw a blue coat. The citizens had at this time rushed to their homes, and hastily arming themselves, returned to the fray. The rebels, then rushing over the fences, mounted their horses which had been tied there, and retreated about eight or ten rods from the court house. Here they made a momentary halt, but again took to their heels, when the citizens charged on them. At this charge, one John Cooper, a big, loud mouthed Copperhead, was captured and brought back. He attempted to escape by running into Jenkins' store, when the soldiers fired, killing him instantly, as also John Jenkins, who was closing the shop door to keep Cooper out. This was the last shot fired. The rebels again retreated in a straggling manner to O'Hair's residence, about a quarter of a mile from the Court House. Here O'Hair and John Frazer, a well to do farmer living about eight miles north of Charleston, attempted to rally their cowardly brethren but failed. John O'Hair then took an axe, and with the rebels, turned North, crossing the railroad track. Here the worthy sheriff cut down a telegraph pole and severed the wire, but not before a dispatch had been sent to Mattoon for the soldiers. The rebels then retreated pell mell out of town, and when the soldiers came up from Mattoon, there was not a copperhead to be seen, save the dead ones, and they were of no particular account. As I have sent you the names of the killed and wounded by telegraph, I need not repeat them here. Whenever a copperhead fell wounded, his companions carried him off to the wagons, and drove out of town. Consequently I am unable to give the number of their wounded.

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