



Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 100

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Olmsted Residents Have Been on the Phone for 12 Decades

Today, in the early years of the 21st century, almost everyone has a cellular phone as close as a pocket or pocketbook anytime, anywhere. Of course, that wasn't always the case. Inventor Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated the first telephone in March 1876, and Cleveland got its first phone one year later, but it took decades before telephones – the kind attached by wires – became common in people's homes. It was 120 years ago this fall, in 1901, when phones started to become more than a rarity in homes in and around Olmsted Falls and West View.

The telephones might have come sooner, but they didn't. In his 1966 book of Olmsted history, Walter Holzworth wrote that Olmsted Falls Village Council received a request in 1898 from a Mr. Taylor of the Cleveland Telephone Company to install and operate a telephone system. The council approved the proposal to erect poles and string wires. The local phone exchange was supposed to be set up in the factory Ed Kidney operated on River Street (now River Road). Holzworth had no explanation why that didn't happen, and it took another three years for work to begin on bringing phone service to Olmsted.



Alexander Graham Bell, seen here with wife Mabel and daughters, Elsie and Marian, in 1885, invented the telephone 25 years before phones became common in Olmsted.

There was one small exception. The April 15, 1898, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* included this item in the West View column: “Who will say that West View is placed in the back ground? Mr. James Rundle has a telephone from his residence to the barn.”

Otherwise, it took until the summer and fall of 1901 before items about the installation of telephone wires popped up frequently in the Olmsted Falls and West View columns of the *Advertiser*. In the June 21, 1901, edition, the Olmsted Falls column included this item: “Bell Telephone Co. are putting up telephone wires in the village.”

One week later, the columnist, who went by the pseudonym Eclipse, included that development as one of a few signs of progress for the community. In the June 28 issue, the writer’s comment was: “Olmsted Falls has a fine stone sidewalk on every street. Also lamps and good shade. Now a telephone is being put up, Next comes the street car.”

Olmsted Falls never did get a streetcar, but it gradually got more phones. In the July 12, 1901, paper, the West View columnist, who went by the name Beth, wrote this: “The new telephone from Olmsted Falls to West View and Copopa is nearly completed and there are some here who are soon going to have the privilege of conversing from their residences over the wire with Berea friends.” Copopa was an unincorporated spot in central Columbia Township.



This is one type of phone used in 1901.

The Olmsted Falls columnist noted another development in the August 16 *Advertiser*. “Citizens Telephone Exchange is being put in at F.J. Moley’s,” the column said. Felix Moley, known to friends as Phil, ran a clothing store just south of the railroad tracks on the east side of Columbia Street (now Columbia Road) in downtown Olmsted Falls. (Later in the 20th century, Barnum’s grocery operated on that site until it burned down in the 1960s. The lot at 8051 Columbia Road then remained vacant for decades until 2015, when Clint Williams built a replica of an 1880 train depot there. It now houses Pinot’s Palette.)

“The Citizen’s Telephone Co. are pushing the work right along,” the Olmsted Falls columnist wrote in the September 6, 1901, edition. “The exchange is at F.J. Moley’s. Also 5 telephones in the town all ready [*sic*] working; hope to see the good citizens take hold and push it along.”

Apparently, the good citizens did push it along over the next couple of months because the Olmsted Falls columnist wrote in the November 11, 1901, issue of the *Advertiser*: “The Citizens’ Telephone Company is making great headway; many phones are being put in the residences.” Later that month, in the November 29 issue, the columnist noted: “The depot has a phone.”

Phones apparently became common enough in the following months that their appearance rarely warranted a mention in future columns. One exception, which proves

the point, appeared in the West View column of the *Advertiser* for March 7, 1902: “The telephone seem [*sic*] indispensable to those who use it, especially since the streets are so muddy.”

However, five years later in the July 20, 1906, edition, the Olmsted Falls columnist, then using the pseudonym DeSoto, greeted the installation of a new telephone line in the community as a mixed blessing: “We see there is to be another telephone through our Main street and it is to go on the west side of the street so of course the beautiful shade trees will be spoiled the same as on the other side, but improvements are needed of course.” (Back then, Main Street referred to a big stretch of what now is called Columbia Road. It went from the intersection next to what now is the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel around the bend, over Plum Creek and then north. Columbia Street included all of what now is Main Street south of Water Street and the rest of what now is Columbia Road south of there.)

The columnist didn’t mention in that item which company was installing the new phone line, but in a September 7, 1906, column, the writer included this item: “The new Bell Telephone cable has been put up on the west side of Columbia street,” Thus, perhaps both items referred to expansion of service by Bell Telephone.



This old photo of a train near the Olmsted Falls depot also shows the utility poles that first carried telegraph lines and later telephone lines.

Telephone service in Olmsted Falls, West View and the rest of Olmsted Township came years after phones were introduced in Berea. According to Ross Bassett, an *Olmsted 200* reader and retired lineman for Ohio Bell, some Bereans experienced the marvel of telephonic communication just two years after its invention. In a story for *The Enterprise*, the publication of the Berea Historical Society, in the spring of 1988, Bassett wrote that Berea Mayor Joseph Nichols on March 20, 1878, asked George H. Wadsworth, a telephone operator, to give a lecture in Berea on Alexander Bell’s invention.

“Mr. Wadsworth accepted and on a Saturday night in April of 1878, before a standing-room-only crowd, he gave not only a lecture, but an actual demonstration of an Edison Telephone strung between the hall and the offices of Hubbard and Buckner across the corner,” Bassett wrote. “Messages were transmitted back and forth much to the amusement of the audience. Mayor J. Nichols and Attorney Hubbard were the first men in Berea to exchange greetings over a phone.”

Just a few months later, the McDermott and Berea Stone Company established the first private phone line from Berea to Cleveland. “It was over this line that the sad news of President James A. Garfield’s assassination reached Berea [in 1881]”, Bassett wrote.

According to his story, the first telephone for public use in Berea was installed by the Cleveland Telephone Company at S.S. Oatman's Meat Market at the southeast corner of Bridge Street and Front Street on October 21, 1883. The cost to make a call was 25 cents.



The Bell System used this logo around 1900.

Cleveland received its first long-distance service in 1883. By 1893, American Telephone and Telegraph Company, the long-distance subsidiary of Bell Telephone, began serving Cleveland. In 1899, AT&T became the Bell System's parent company. That structure remained for several decades.

Citizens Telephone Company started its first telephone exchange in Berea on April 7, 1899, with 70 subscribers and 41 numbers. In the early years, service was available only from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The Citizens Telephone Company became part of the Ohio State Telephone Company in 1918. Meanwhile, the Berea Telephone Company started in 1906 in a two-story, brick building at 33 East Bridge Street, according to Bassett.

Other phone companies that operated in the area included the Cleveland Telephone Company, which was a licensee of Bell Telephone, and the Cuyahoga Telephone Company. In 1921, Cleveland Telephone became Ohio Bell Telephone Company. Through a series of mergers in subsequent years, Ohio Bell became the state's dominant provider of phone services. Among its acquisitions was the Berea Telephone Company.



The Bell System introduced the Model 500 phone in 1949. It became the most widely produced dial phone ever, lasting a generation.

Throughout most of the 20th century, developments in telephone service in Olmsted Falls, Berea and other communities in the area were in the hands of Ohio Bell. In Berea, Ohio Bell operated out of the original Berea Telephone Company exchange on East Bridge Street until March 1942, at which time it had 18 operators and more than 2,200 phone lines, according to Bassett. At midnight on March 28, 1942, the company switched over to a new Ohio Bell exchange at 22 Bagley Road, and it also switched from manual service to dial service.

Bassett said he believes Olmsted was served for many years from the Berea exchange, but eventually Olmsted Falls, West View and Olmsted Township got their own exchange along Bagley Road in Olmsted Falls. It was known as the Adams Exchange because the local phone numbers began with the exchange name ADams 5 or AD5. In the 1960s, the phone system switched from using such exchange names to using all-number dialing. Thus, "ADams 5" became known as "235."

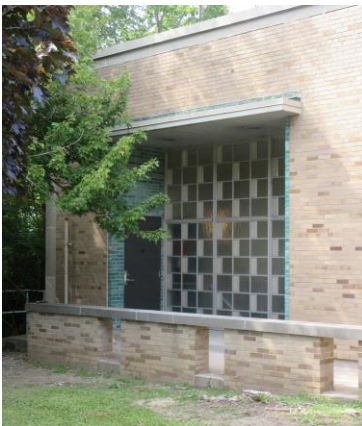
Ground was broken for the Adams Exchange on July 23, 1959. It went into service in September 1960. Holzworth wrote in his history book, that the exchange building, which was estimated to cost about \$800,000, “was a welcome tax producing establishment within the Village.”

Bassett, who is now vice president of the West Park Historical Society, has fond memories of the Adams Exchange:



This is the Adams Exchange building that Ohio Bell built at 25200 Bagley Road in Olmsted Falls in 1959.

I started with Ma Bell in 1970 and being sent out to work at the Adams exchange was always a big treat. I remember that we would park our big line trucks in the gravel lot behind the exchange. Nothing but woods between the parking lot and the river to the north. Our driveway on the east side of the building was also the access driveway for an old house that stood for many years just to the northeast of the new exchange property. We would walk through the woods to get to a restaurant in the new shopping center passing old Damp’s Mill along the way. That restaurant is now gone but I think the same location is now the site of an eye doctor [the Eye Place]. This would be located in the building just to the west of the Damp’s Mill overlook. I never failed to look at what was left of the old mill and thought of the history it must [have] had. The only other thing I remember is a fairly good size stone quarry right on Bagley very close to the west side of the river and just a few feet to the east of the entrance driveway. It was in the woods, but it always impressed me. I believe that almost all of this is now gone with the construction of the [Mill River] condos along the river.



This is the entrance to the Adams Exchange building.

The Bell System’s dominance in both local and long-distance telephone services came to an end in the early 1980s, when AT&T settled an antitrust lawsuit filed against it in the 1970s by the U.S. Department of Justice. The AT&T member companies were merged into seven independent regional holding companies in an arrangement that took effect January 1, 1984. Ohio Bell became part of Ameritech. Other phones companies’ services became available. That was just the beginning of many changes in the telephone industry. In the 1990s, cellular phones began taking over for much of the traditional landline service, and that trend accelerated in the 21st century. Landline phone service still exists, but mobile phones proliferated

and dominate the industry today.

Consequences of that include the almost total disappearance of telephone booths and the need for more area codes, which is why Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and other communities in northeastern Ohio other than Cleveland switched from area code 216 to the area code 440 beginning August 16, 1997. Another consequence is that many Olmsted residents now have phone numbers that no longer include the 235 exchange.



Ohio Bell phone booths bore this logo.

Thanks go to Ross Bassett for his help on this story and the next one.

Pieces of Telephone History Can Be Found in Olmsted

Just as some people collect coins and others collect stamps, certain people interested in the history of telephone and electrical service collect glass insulators, many of which can be found in certain places around Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. For example, David Kennedy, who frequently contributes research to *Olmsted 200*, has found several types of glass insulators in woods near the CSX railroad tracks in southern Olmsted Falls.



These are several of the glass insulators David Kennedy found near the CSX tracks in Olmsted Falls.

Ross Bassett, a former lineman for Ohio Bell, said they were mostly used for 110-volt and 220-volt power wires.

“Their main purpose was to prevent any voltage leakage,” he explained in an email. “An open

power wire could be tied to the insulator and the power would not escape down the pole to the ground, especially in wet or snowy weather. It would also help to protect any worker climbing the pole from getting zapped.”

The insulators were used for both telephone lines and electrical lines. Glass is an insulator rather than a conductor of current.

“At one time a few years back, they were highly collectible but not so much now,” Bassett said. “There are many, many different types. The ones with the Mickey Mouse look-alike ears were among the most collectible. Some of the other highly collectible ones were the ones that were used alongside of the railroad tracks. Not unusual for one telephone pole to have a couple of dozen of these on the many crossarms above.”

The glass insulators were very common in the late 19th century and early 20th century. As technology advanced in the 20th century, many telephone lines switched to insulated, sheathed cables with many wires in each and phased out the glass insulators.

Although Bassett doesn't collect glass insulators, he does collect pole date tags. "These are nails that look somewhat like roofing nails but they have a year stamped on the part you hammer," he wrote. "The date is usually recessed so that it does not get damaged. For many, many years, whenever anyone placed a telephone pole, the nail would be added near the bottom to show the year the pole was placed. This would help a technician in the field to know if it was safe to climb or not because poles tend to rot below ground after 20 or 30 years. Many were made of copper. [They are] only found on the oldest of poles now."



This Hemingray Glass Company insulator, found by David Kennedy, was patented May 2, 1893.

Thanks go to David Kennedy, as well as Ross Bassett, for help on this story.

High School Football Field Turns 50 This Month



This photo from the 1971 Seniorio shows the press box at the old football field in its last season.

Fifty years ago this month, the Olmsted Falls Bulldogs inaugurated a new football field on September 17, 1971, when they played their first home football game of the season against North Royalton. Although the new high school had opened for classes three years earlier in September 1968, the school didn't have its own football field until 1971. During the football seasons of 1968, 1969 and 1970, games remained at the field at the old high school, which served as the middle school until it was replaced by the current middle school in 1996.

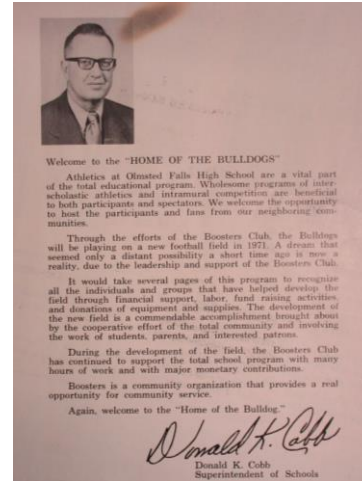
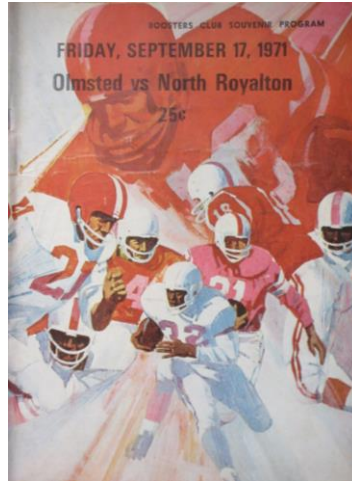
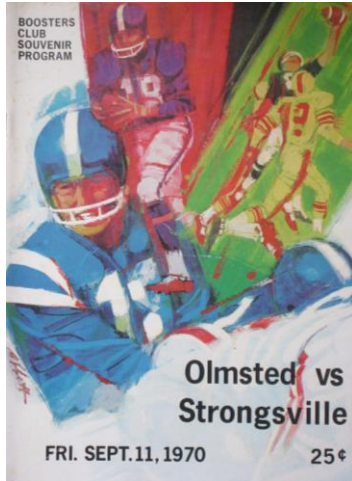
The delay in building the new football field was a matter of money. The school district couldn't afford it using public funds, so it relied on the Boosters Club (now the Olmsted Falls Athletic Boosters) to raise the money through various means, including the so-called "sale" of small pieces of the new field to members of the public who gained only the right to say they helped with the cause.

"Presently, the Boosters Club is carrying the ball to finance the lights for the new football field," Superintendent Donald Cobb wrote in the Boosters Club's programs for football games in the fall of 1970. "Contracts have been awarded and construction should be completed in the near future. Upon completion of the field, the football home of the 'BULLDOGS' will move to 26939 Bagley Road.



This yearbook photo shows the team on the old field in 1970.

This project is a major undertaking and the Boosters Club is to be commended for their efforts in providing this major improvement at this time.”



The 1970 Boosters Club program on the left contained messages about the drive to raise funds for a new football field at Olmsted Falls High School. The 1971 program in the middle from the inaugural game at the new field included the message on the right from Superintendent Donald Cobb.

Elsewhere in the programs for that fall, the Boosters Club said it had raised \$13,000 for the lights so far. The school district also reduced the cost of building a stadium by acquiring spectator stands from Baldwin-Wallace College. In early 1971, the college tore down Ray E. Watts Stadium, which had stood for only 13 years. It was replaced by George Finney Stadium, which still serves B-W as well as the Cleveland Browns.



The 1972 Senorio had this photo of play during the 1971 season on the new football field.

“Through the efforts of the Boosters Club, the Bulldogs will be playing on a new football field in 1971,” Cobb wrote in the football programs for the fall of 1971. “A dream that seemed only a distant possibility a short time ago is now a reality, due to the leadership and support of the Boosters Club.”

Thirty-four years later, on September 2, 2005, the school system rededicated the home of the Bulldogs as Charles A. Harding Memorial Stadium after privately funded renovations that cost about \$700,000. The renovations included an arched entranceway and a walkway of engraved bricks at the front. Clara and Amelia Harding were major contributors for the new bleachers on the home side, so they earned the right to name the stadium after their brother, who died from wounds received in World War II.

In attendance also that evening were members of the family of Bob Shaker, who had died six years earlier from cancer. He was a member of the first class to go all four years through the new high school and graduate in 1972. He had run his family’s grocery,

Shaker's IGA, served on the Olmsted Township Zoning Board and was a member of the Olmsted Chamber of Commerce. The press box was named for him.



On the left is the archway at the renovated Charles A. Harding Memorial Stadium. The center photo shows the home stands topped by the press box dedicated to Bob Shaker. On the right, the sign proclaims newly named Vitamix Field.

“This is such a tremendous accomplishment for our community and school system,” the *News Sun* quoted Superintendent Todd Hoadley as saying about the stadium renovations. “The work that’s been done really reflects the generosity of the Olmsted community toward its school system.”

In early 2019, the football field acquired another name. Because of a 10-year, \$200,000 partnership between the school district and the Vita-Mix Corporation, it became Vitamix Field at Charles A. Harding Memorial Stadium.

Thanks go to Tim Atkinson, who recently retired as director of business affairs for the school system and was deeply involved in the 2005 renovation effort, for helping with this story.

Quarry Blast Almost Cost Olmsted Falls Leader His Life

As has been noted before in *Olmsted 200*, sandstone quarrying was a dangerous occupation. One reminder of that appeared 150 years ago this month in the September 8, 1871, issue of Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser*. That was just a year after quarrying began in Olmsted Falls through the efforts of Luther Barnum and others. L.B. Adams, the editor of the Olmsted column wrote:

Mr. Luther Barnum met with a serious and singular accident, Monday. He was sitting in conversation with some of his workmen, near some powder kegs, the contents of which, except one keg, had been used for blasting. The one excepted had been wet, and when it was used a quantity of the damp powder clung to its sides; but this had dried, and when Mr. B., by accident, dropped a lighted match into it, a great explosion followed. The flames burned Mr. Barnum in the face very severely, scorching the heavy growth of beard entirely off, and injuring the skin to that extent that it will probably all come off. The external

coating of his eyes was severely injured by the flash, and the subsequent symptoms were distressing; but judicious treatment has rendered all danger of a loss of sight entirely improbable. Mr. B. was just inhaling his breath as the powder exploded, and drew in the heat so that the mucous membrane of the throat was effected [sic], and for a while he encountered great difficulty in breathing, in consequence of spasmodic contraction of the throat. The force of the powder may be judged from the fact, that a large hole was blown in the crown of Mr. B's. hat.

Adams added, "Dr. Knowlton, attending physician, informs us to-day, that Mr. Barnum is doing well, and that there is no doubt of his recovery."

That was the first of two quarry accidents that almost took Barnum's life. The second occurred in August 1882, when he was mayor. A hook raising a stone slipped and hit him in the head, knocking him unconscious. The death of the proprietor of the quarry that carved out much of what now is David Fortier River Park would not necessarily have curtailed quarrying in Olmsted Falls, but it certainly would have affected the course of his quarry, as well as civic life in the village.

Return Is Expected for Olmsted Heritage Days

The COVID-19 pandemic knocked out Olmsted Heritage Days, the community festival started in 1992 by Grand Pacific Junction developer Clint Williams, during August 2020, and almost blocked it again in August 2021. However, thanks to some volunteers, several events – including a few already scheduled – were put under the umbrella of Olmsted People's Heritage Days August 6 through August 8. They included a First Friday concert near the Harding Bridge, two historical walks through David Fortier River Park and downtown Olmsted Falls, the Bulldogs Summer Bash on the grounds of Grace Church, and the annual Kiwanis Breakfast on the Bridge.



The First Friday concert by Hard Rock Cleveland August 6 (left) started Olmsted

People's Heritage Days events, and the annual Kiwanis Breakfast on the Bridge on August 8 (right) was the penultimate event.

According to one downtown Olmsted Falls merchant, talks have begun aimed at bringing back a restructured Olmsted Heritage Days in August 2022 that would include such traditional events as the Heritage Days parade. He said the concept being considered would delegate duties more evenly among more people than in the past and might even include some events in Olmsted Township.



The top photo shows people gathered on August 7 for the first of two historical tours of David Fortier River Park and downtown Olmsted Falls. The second tour was conducted on August 8. On the afternoon of



August 7, many children and adults gathered on the grounds of Grace Church for an afternoon of food, games and karaoke singing known as the Bulldogs Summer Bash, as seen in the lower photo.

Many people who schedule class reunions and summer vacations to coincide with Olmsted Heritage Days would welcome its return.

Damp's Mill Gets New Overlook Platform

Olmsted Falls benefits from having so much of its history on display, and fortunately, that still includes the foundation of Damp's Mill. Early in the summer, the wooden platform behind Falls Family Restaurant that overlooks the foundation and Rocky River was in poor condition and in danger of falling apart. But over the summer, the platform was rebuilt with new wood.



This new platform behind Falls Family Restaurant has replaced the old platform overlooking the foundation of Damp's Mill.

Ann Reichle, owner of Angelina's Pizza in Mill River Plaza, said the shopping center's owner and construction crew should get credit for the repairs. Next to the platform is a metal plaque, dedicated in 2014, with the history of Damp's Mill and a photo of what it looked like in the late 1800s, when a two-story wooden building stood on top of the stone foundation. For more on Damp's Mill, see Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013.

Still to Come

When *Olmsted 200* began in June 2013, it would have been hard to predict it would last 100 issues, but it has – and more are on the way. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about what some people believe is Olmsted’s spookiest spot.

If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine, as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted’s history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*’s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community’s history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township’s website. Go to <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to read. All the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. *The Olmsted Story* is available at Angelina’s Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society’s Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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