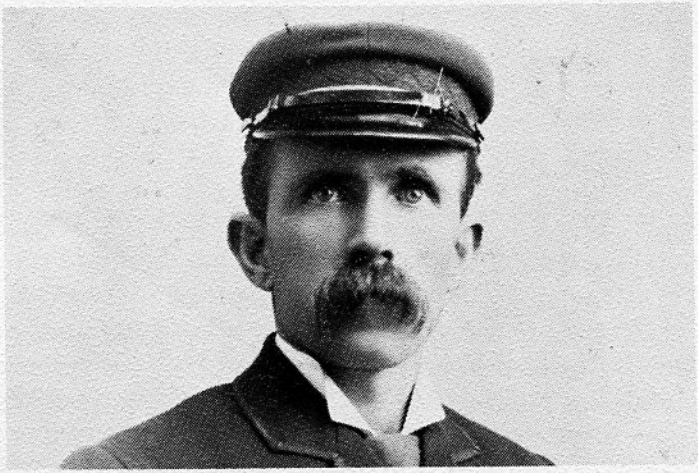
STEILACOOM HISTORICAL



MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Volume 6, Number 1 **Spring, 1977**

DISASTER AT SEA

"Long will be remembered the year 1875, when Death, clad in all his hideousness, rode the wave; and while the relentless seas has supplied Northwestern history with many pitiful tales of disaster, this fatal year has never been equaled in the number of lives and amount of property sacrificed. No greater calamity was ever visited on the people of this Coast than the loss of the steamship *Pacific,* and even at this time, after a lapse of twenty years, the bare mention of her name brings "a pallor into the cheek and a mist before the eye" of those whose loved ones went forth on the ship fated never to reach her destination." Lewis & Dryden's *Marine History of the Pacific Northwest.*

Neil O. Henly, father of Greta Herr, was one of two survivors who lived to tell the tale of the tragic sinking of the *Pacific*. Henly, born in Scotland, began sailing when he was 15. Coming from Australia he shipped on in San Francisco for the *Pacific's* trip north. The steamship left Victoria on November 4, 1875 headed for San Francisco with a full cargo and approximately 250 passengers and crew. Among the passengers were a number of miners from the Cassiar district going to San Francisco for the holidays, Chinese from the northern canneries and northwest merchants going south on business. Mr. Henly served as one of four quarter-

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The Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly is issued quarterly as the official publication of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association authorized by the Board of Directors.

Mail correspondence to the Editor, Box 16, Steilacoom, Washington 98388.
Stephen Brightman . . . . . President
Donn Laughlin . . . . . Director
Alice Watson, Joan Curtis . . . . . Editors

DO WE HAVE A JOB FOR YOU!

Can't draw, hate to serve as chairman, don't have a lot of free time. Does this sound like you? If so, you may be surprised to learn that our Association has a job for you! We have a job that fits *all* of our members. That job is serving as docent two or three times a year (yes, year—not month) at our museum or at the Orr Home. It's one of those simple but very necessary jobs if these two buildings are to be open to the public on a regular basis. Please *don't wait* for us to call you. Volunteer your services by calling Marian Young, 588-0977, (for museum), or Trish Laughlin, 584-2730, (for Orr Home). They'll answer any questions and arrange a time at your convenience for you to serve.

KAUTZ'S DIARY BEING TYPED

• Gary Reese is spending his evenings typing. Typing 230 pages of the A. V. Kautz diary which had been preserved on microfilm at the University of Washington.

The diary begins on July 1, 1857 when Kautz arrived at Ft. Steilacoom and continues on until he leaves to fight in the Civil War. During his first year at the Fort the young officer climbed to within 400 feet of Mt. Rainier, built the officers' homes which are still standing on the Western State Hospital grounds and reported on the activities at the Fort and the surrounding area. He stated "They (soldiers at the Fort) lived in an alcoholic daze." Kautz employed 24 carpenters to construct buildings. He continued to buy wood from Balch & Webber even though the wood was poor quality. In addition he purchased lumber from Port Townsend, Port Gamble, Crosby at Tumwater and Thomas Chambers.

When Gary has finished with his eyestraining work, hopefully the diary can be published so everyone can read what life was like in the late 1850's.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

As the new president of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association I would like first of all to publically thank all the people who are responsible for the smooth running of this large organization. I especially want to make note of the yeoman service that Lynn Scholes has given to this Association in the past years, the last two in particular. As a matter of fact he will continue to give his invaluable assistance to us as Executive Assistant to the President. It was felt by your president that this position was necessary for a smoother operation of this organization. Because I am employed out of town I felt it is necessary to have someone here in the town to represent me and the Association. At the February meeting the Board of Trustees approved my recommendation for creating the position of Executive Assistant to the President. Lynn has graciously agreed to serve in this capacity. I am sure that he will be a tremendous aid to those wishing to use the many facilities which we now have available.

I would like to thank Mrs. Esther Spreen for her years of diligent devotion to the task of historian. She has done a fine job and at times I am sure it must have seemed like a thankless task, but it is this gathering of contemporary news that makes the history of tomorrow. And with dedicated people like Mrs. Spreen it makes the task of historians that much easier, so on behalf of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association I thank you very much, Mrs. Spreen, and it is with some reluctance that we accept your resignation.

In closing I would like to say that I am looking forward to another great year and if there are any members who feel they would like to contribute either physical work or constructive criticism we shall be happy to get either or both.

Stephen Brightman

DUES ARE DUE!

Just a reminder about your 1977 dues. The $5.00 per family dues are now due and payable. Or if you would like to eliminate the yearly dues paying, you may pay $25.00 for an Individual Life Membership or $40.00 for a Family Life Membership. Your checks should be made payable to the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association, P.O. Box 16, Steilacoom, WA 98388. Please call Membership Chairman Betty Solberg, 588-8533, for further information.

ANOTHER "FIRST" FOR STEILACOOM

On April 21 Steilacoom will be chalking up another "first." Recently elected Governor Dixy Lee Ray will visit our town for her first Town Meeting with citizens. Although she will be scheduling other Town Meetings throughout the state during her term in office, she chose the first official town in the state as the site for her first meeting. All Steilacoom residents are invited to come to Town Hall with their questions and comments. The Town Meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., Thursday, April 21.

A NEW LOOK AT OUR MUSEUM

Have you visited our museum lately? If not, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Museum Curator Janda Volkmer is grouping similar items into attractive settings. These displays are not only pleasing to look at, but help show the relationships among the various items.

Currently an excellent Quilt Exhibition is on display. Included are examples of quilt construction, quilting information, and approximately a dozen quilts—some very old and some of recent construction. Several beautiful pieces of handmade lace are also displayed. Wendy Herd, Esther Spreen and others assisted with the Quilt Exhibition which will be on display for the next several weeks.

Another change is the freshly painted floor in the museum's first room. Plans are underway for the floor painting in the second room sometime this spring. Our thanks to Clyde Davidson, Janda Volkmer, and their helpers for this work.

Our museum, located in the downstairs of Steilacoom Town Hall, is open on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 to 4:00.

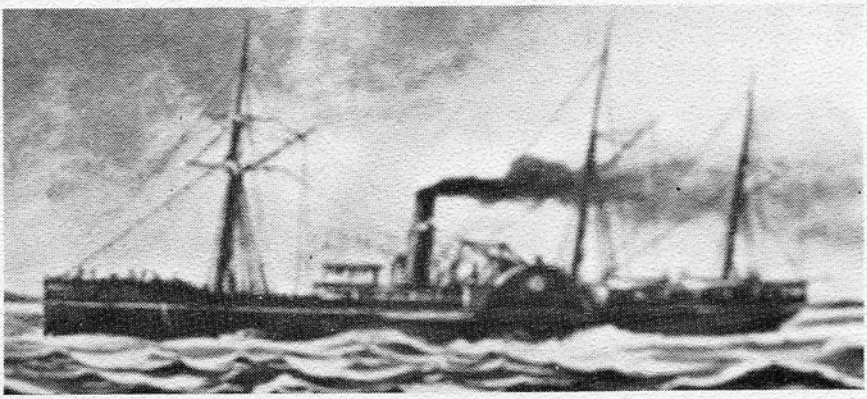
BRIGHTMAN HEADS ASSOCIATION

Stephen Brightman was elected president of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association at the annual business-dinner meeting in December. Other new officers and board members are Gerry Evanson, vice-president; Joan Curtis, secretary; Ann Daubenspeck and Lyle Dunkin, Board of Trustees. Continuing in office are Bert Magnuson, treasurer; Eudocia Leech, Bonnie Stucker, Robert Johnson and Fred Rosevear, Trustees; Marian Young, docents; and Betty Solberg, membership. Our thanks to Hilda Skott who retired as secretary after several years.

Disaster at Sea cont. from p. 1

masters. The *Pacific* steamed past Tatoosh about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and headed south. The *Orpheus,* making her first trip up the coast, was in ballast and with a strong wind from the south was making good time. The mate saw a light which he supposed to be the light on Tatoosh, but which proved to be the *Pacific*. No one knows just how it happened, but a few minutes later the *Orpheus* struck the *Pacific* a glancing blow, smashing the bow completely off. The captain of the *Orpheus* attending to the damage of his own ship was unaware of the destruction to the *Pacific* and drifted away. The *Orpheus* was to pile up on the rocks off Vancouver Island the next day, but no lives were lost.

Later Neil Henly went to San Francisco to appear before a Board of Inquiry to give his story which was printed in the *San Francisco Post* on December 18, 1875. He stated, "While I was in my bunk asleep, I was aroused by a great crash at the bow, within ten feet from where I lay. My first thought was, 'We have struck a rock.' I then sprang from my bunk, and, to my horror and bewilderment, a flood of water was rushing in torrents through the ship's bow, and in a moment my berth, with near a dozen others, was submerged in the hungry waves. We all rushed up on the main deck, not even having time to grab our clothes or put on our socks or boots."



Steamship Pacific was wrecked in 1875.

Reaching the deck he found a confusion of broken timbers, men, women and children. "I now heard the Captain, who was standing in front of the pilothouse, for I saw him as he spoke, give an order to the man at the wheel to starboard the helm,' which would turn the bow of the ship toward the land, and bring the wind on the starboard beam. She then commenced to lean

heavily to the port side. The next thing I saw the people trying to clear the boats. While this was being done, I heard Captain Howell sing out, 'Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy.' I then looked and saw a ship's light a little abaft the starboard beam. The first thing I did, as I heard no orders given, was to go and assist those who were endeavoring to free the boats on the starboard side. I found others, like myself, horrified, bewildered, as we could see death we staring us in the face from all sides—in the air, the piercing wind, from the heavens the cold and heavy rain, while beneath us was the hungry and ever unmerciful waves, preparing for their quick death."

Henly soon found himself in that water. "I then saw something floating towards me with people on it, which afterwards proved to be a portion of the hurricane deck. I reached it, and by degrees crawled on, and found Captain Howell, with pants and undershirt on, and the second mate, who was dressed the same, taking care of a lady passenger, with dark hair flowing over her shoulders, dark dress and shoes. I then said to Captain Howell: 'Captain, how far are we from land?' 'Fifteen or twenty miles,' he replied. I then said: 'I expect we will see the ship when daylight comes.' 'Yes, I expect she is knocking around somewhere,' was his reply."

"It was about half-past eleven, with an increase of wind and a rising sea. I could hear the cries of help in the distance, all around. Thus our first night was spent, until about five o'clock in the morning a heavy sea broke over our raft, carrying in its embrace our Captain, second mate, the lady, and our tall passenger, never more to be seen. There now remained, this Friday morn, but four to fight the storm and waves."

"In the forenoon the second cook died from exposure, and was seen carried by the waves to cold grave. . . About four o'clock in the afternoon we sighted the land on our right, the wind still lashing the waves in its fury. I then said to the remaining passenger, who had hold of the legs of my pants, so as to secure himself from floating off the raft, while I was standing up, holding on to the stanchion (for the wheel was gone) 'Old man, cheer up, the land is in sight.' He simply raised his care-worn face until his anxious eyes met my gaze, but his lips were dump. Soon his head sank down on the raft, and in half an hour he died, without a word of murmer."

"There now remained but two to try the perils of another night. About 5 o'clock the next morning, being Saturday, my only companion, and brother quartermaster, endeavored to stand up, to change his position, but being so wear from exposure, fell back

into the ever-ready waves, never to rise again until 'the sea gives up its dead.' I then thought, 'It will be my turn next.' "

Hours passed as Henly stayed afloat. Once he saw a ship passing, but it was too far away to attract her attention. A box about five feet long, eighteen inches wide and twelve inches deep floated by and he was able to haul it up on the raft and secure it. He "gradually sat down in it to sleep, fully resigned to my fate, and my soul to the mercy of God." The next night "I prepared myself in the box for another sleep, expecting that each time would be my last; when, about three o'clock I was aroused by a noise which I supposed was a ship dropping her anchor. I turned my head, and dimly saw three lights, bearing down upon me. I then stood up. Yes, stood up! for something seemed to give me strength and penetrate my nerves with life and power. I shouted with all the strength I could command: 'Steamboat, ahoy!' And the answer came back with a thrill that penetrated the very life currents of my being: 'Yes! I will be there directly.' My heart bounded in gratitude to God, as I felt that at last I was saved.

"They called me again: 'Are you one of the men from the *Pacific*?' I answered back, 'Yes.' . . .Carefully they came; slowly they came, for fear my raft might break, when the silence of the moment was disturbed by the pilot exclaiming: 'My good God! You must be near dead?' I answered, 'I a-m, v-e-r-y n-e-a-r.' He assisted me into the boat, and tenderly placed me in the stern. . . I now looked and saw for the last time, though dimly in the shadows of that eventful night, the box, the raft on which I had been seventy-eight hours tossed on the ocean's breast, and was now eighty-eight hours without food or drink, and from which seven human lives had been washed off into the great depths beneath."

Henly was returned to Victoria. Accounts of the tragedy of the *Pacific* have been written and rewritten. Captain Neil O. Henly was the hero who lived to tell the story. In *The Seattle Times,* June 6, 1942, an article said: "Bright blue eyes, keen with a halfcentury of searching horizons and cheeks rosy with as many years of stinging salt water, 86-year-old Neil Henly, only living survivor of 'one of the greatest marine disasters of the Pacific,' yesterday told his story to his fellow old-timers at the 60th annual reunion of the Pioneer Association of the State of Washington, And then he said 'Quit the sea? No, I kept right on.' " And continue on he did.

He was employed on a number of Sound steamers until 1877, his last work there being as mate on the old steamer *Beaver*. After serving as town marshall in Steilacoom for several years he again

returned to the sea in 1894, shipping as quartermaster on the British steamer *Tacoma* sailing between Puget Sound and Hongkong. He was on vessels plying out of San Francisco for a period, spent two years on the revenue-cutter *Corwin* and was superintendent of boats at McNeil Island Penitentiary for 20 years.

On December 31, 1885 Neil Henly and Marcella Rigney were married at the Catholic church in Steilacoom. They were to live in the community for over 50 years adding to Steilacoom's history and having eight children. Four children are still living, Greta Herr and Nan Friemann of Steilacoom, Alice Henly of Lakewood and George Henly in Oregon.

Captain Henly was the first president of the Steilacoom Civil Improvement Cub organized March 20, 1924, which was later changed to the Steilacoom Chamber of Commerce. He was instrumental in the reorganization of the library in the late 1920's and locating it in the present facility in the Town Hall. Henly started the move which developed the road between Steilacoom and Dupont in January, 1929. After a formal ceremony opening the road Governor Hartley and town officials were entertained at the Henly home.

Captain Henly passed away on March 13, 1944 at the age of 88 having lived a rich and full life. Fortunate we are that he survived the *Pacific* disaster.

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

A capacity turnout of 170 Historical Association members attended the Annual Christmas Dinner Meeting at the Town Hall in December. Shining brass was beautifully displayed with ferns and gaily decorated Christmas balls against a red backdrop. Each dining table was decorated with brass candlesticks, moss green candles and red cloths. The evening began with the serving of hors d'oeuvres and wassail, followed by round of beef dinner and completed with flaming plum pudding.

Lynn Scholes, outgoing president, conducted a brief business meeting during which new officers were elected. He presented Certificates of Appreciation to Eudocia Leech for her gift of the parcel of land next to the Bair Store which will be turned into a park and to "Cub" Bair for his gift of the Bair Store. Lynn was presented with a fern in appreciation for the two years he has served so ably as president.

The evening concluded with entertainment provided by "Rhinestone Rosie" who sang songs from the turn of the century. Patty Forsyth and Adelta Schwab, assisted by Donn Laughlin, were in charge of the dinner.

SALMUGUNDI

* Work time for our Association is coming up again. Help is needed for some of our annual events: the Salmon Bake and the Apple Squeeze, in particular. Can you volunteer this year? Please call Gerry Evanson, 584-9208, evenings.

* The Historical Association is considering a full-fledged effort to complete a really good file of old photographs of Steilacoom scenes and residents and of the immediately surrounding area. Do you have old photographs you would like to donate to such a file? Or, if you do not see fit to part with the photographs, perhaps the Historical Association could raise funds to pay for the copying of particularly valuable photos. Representative photographs of the 20's, 30's, 40's and 50's should not be overlooked as they are needed as well. Please contact Gerry Evanson, 584-9208, or Janda Volkmer, 584-5114, if you have photos to share.

NOTICE

The Hospital Steward at Fort Steilacoom has on hand a quantity of Medicines and Drugs, which he will sell to citizens.

Prescriptions for Syphilis and Gonorrhea carefully compounded.

Inquire at the Hospital Stewards' room, Hospital building.

Chas. J. Fitzgerald
Puget Sound Herald
April 2, 1858

* The Orr Home has had a spring cleaning preparing for a busy season of tours and visitors. Window washing, floor cleaning, laundering of curtains and linens and mowing the lawn with the new lawn mower were a few of the many activities members worked on March 26 and 27. Upkeep of the yard and orchard will be a continuing project. Please contact Trish Laughlin at 584-2730 if you can help this spring and summer.

* An 1874 pump organ has been given the Association by Natalie Hatcher Christesson. The organ was used in the old Steilacoom school until it was torn down in 1917. George Salzer remembers Miss Davis, principal, teaching the children Silent Night in German as they stood around the organ. As it was not needed in

the new school it was given to the Salzer family where it remained many years before being given to Natalie. The organ is now in the parlor of the Orr Home.

* The state legislature voted in March to honor Mother Joseph, the Roman Catholic nun who founded dozens of institutions around the state including the Convent, established in 1864, which stood next to the Immaculate Conception Catholic Mission. If final approval is given, her statue will stand next to Marcus Whitman's in the national Statuary Hall, which pays tribute to two historical figures from each of the nation's 50 states. The Steilacoom Historical Museum Association Board had endorsed Mother Joseph's candidacy at a meeting in October.

Ball— An opportunity being afforded by the presence of two excellent musicians (Two gentlemen from the Sandwich Islands, Messs Pickering and McFarland, pianist and violinist) last Tuesday evening was fixed upon by the lovers of dancing for a Ball. Notwithstanding inclement weather at the time, the ball room was crowded at an early hour; and the exciting pleasure was indulged in, with little cessation, until daylight. Abundant provision was made for the inner man, and all departed for their respective homes in good spirits.

Puget Sound Herald
April 2, 1858

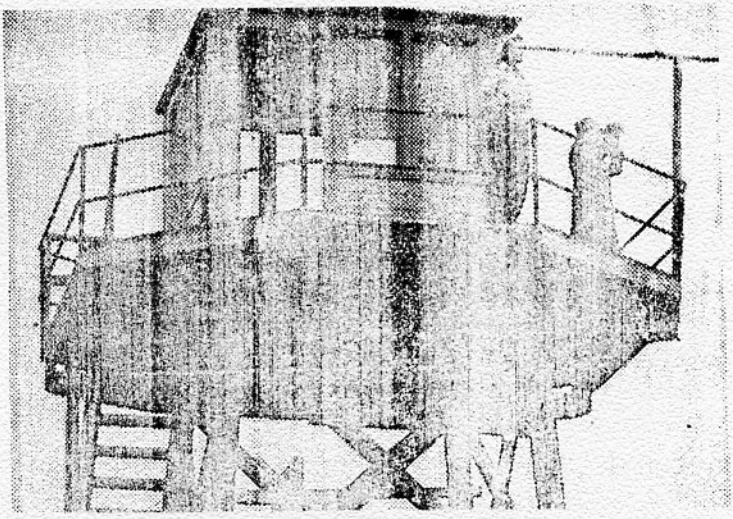
* Needed for the Orr Home—4 antique goblets for the dining room table, a parlor stove for the dining room.

MARRIED

In Steilacoom on Sunday evening, March 31, by Rev. Mr. Berry, Mr. Phillip Keach to Miss Sarah Antoinette Martin, both of Steilacoom.

Long may you live in wedded bliss,
A hundred years or more,
And may you have a million boys,
And girls a hundred score;
And when you both shall come to die,
We hope you'll die together,
And trust the day you're bu-ri-ed,
It won't be rainy weather.

Puget Sound Herald
April 2, 1858



STEILACOOM HAD A PROUD RECORD IN CIVIL DEFENSE

A thirty-plus year old newspaper clipping proclaims another "first" for Steilacoom. This "first" didn't relate to our library, jail, or courthouse. Instead it told that Steilacoom was undoubtedly first in the state in its response to civil defense work. Steilacoom, then a town of approximately 1,000, had nearly 25 per cent of its citizens assigned to regular duty in the civilian defense corps. Barney Drew, then a member of the Steilacoom Town Council and Co-ordinator of the Civil Defense operations, reported that 244 Steilacoom citizens were active in the Civilian Defense work, and an additional 100 citizens had volunteered and were to be assigned.

The article said, "While Steilacoom has ambulance corps, air raid wardens, first aid workers and fire wardens, the pride of the town's civilian defense setup is the air raid observation tower."

Pride of the town it was! As a proud reminder of her days as Barney Drew's assistant, Greta Herr, to this day, carries her Ground Observer Corps card in her billfold right next to her driver's license. The card dated January 10, 1943, names Mrs. Margaret Herr as First Assistant Observer in the U.S. Army Air Forces IV Fighter Command Aircraft Warning Service. It is signed by Brigadier General W. E. Kerner. "I honestly don't know why I still carry it," confessed Greta. "I guess I just hated to take it out."

Greta's pride is understandable. Within hours of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, an emergency town meeting was called at Town Hall. When Barney Drew asked for volunteers for civilian defense work, he was swamped! The meeting didn't

last long. Automobile and house lights had to be blacked out; people were fearful that the West Coast would be attacked.

Volunteers were also recruited at the "Bundles for Britain" meeting at Alice McClelland's. Steilacoom was organized to begin protecting the homefront before most communities had had time to think about it.

Aircraft observation work began immediately. Volunteers served shifts on the lawn in front of Barney Drew's home on Lafayette Street. Permanent observation site was soon to come, however. The town owned an abandoned tower which had once held a water tank. It stood at the top of the hill on Olympia Street. Under Drew's direction the town council voted the funds to convert the tower to an aircraft observation tower.

The observation tower operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Teams of two served three-hour shifts. Women handled the job from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.; men from 5:00 p.m. through the night. Greta, in charge of scheduling the women, recalls that most enjoyed serving as teams—Grace McVicker and Don Betts, Ethel Scholes and Carrie Dunn, and many others. "There was always somebody to jump in if someone couldn't serve a particular day," commented Greta. "People were just great!"

Dale Welfringer recounts the only casualty of the observation tower. One day when Dale, then a teenager, was serving his shift, his pet dog Fuzzy fell asleep, rolled off the tower and was killed. Dale also remembers the cribbage games played late at night to wile away the hours.

Steilacoom was recognized throughout the Puget Sound area for its accuracy in spotting and identifying aircraft. It had an outstanding record of service. Civil Defense leaders Barney Drew, Greta Herr, Delia Tinkcom, Gus Westby, plus literally hundreds of townspeople proudly served the town and the nation during the War years.

Front Page Photo: Neil O. Henly. Photo courtesy of Marcella Norden.

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MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
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