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Total membership:

395 on February 10

Life members: 158

March Program “Les Magasins (The Stores)”

The Kennebec Historical Society’s March program is the documentary video “Les Magasins” (The Stores), presented by Norm Rodrigue.

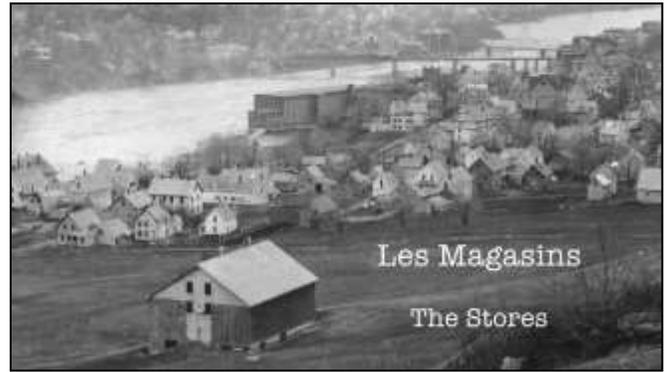
In 1952 there were at least 76 grocery stores in Augusta, according to the city directory. In addition, there were meat markets, fruit and vegetable stores, confectionaries, bakeries, fish stores and several drug stores.

Most were independently owned. Sand Hill, Augusta’s Franco-American neighborhood, had a larger concentration of neighborhood grocery stores — magasins. Depending on the source, 18 to 27 stores operated on Sand Hill at various times.

The 48-minute video “Les Magasins” explores the history of small, family-owned grocery stores located on Sand Hill in the early to late 20th century. Several former Sand Hill residents whose families owned and operated neighborhood stores were interviewed to capture a representative sense of life on “The Hill.” The documentary includes historical photographs from the Kennebec Historical Society’s digital archive collection, as well as photos provided by the families themselves and St. Michael Parish. While the documentary focuses on Sand Hill, the broader story applies to the city as a whole, describing a close-knit community made up of shopkeepers in a time before big-box stores, malls and too many cars. The event includes time for questions after the video presentation.

Our speaker, Norm Rodrigue, was born in Augusta in 1949 and raised on Sand Hill. He came from a family of seven children. His father and grandfather were classic Franco-American millworkers who worked at the Bates/Edwards mill. He attended St. Augustine School and graduated from Cony High School. He earned a B.A. in English and a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Maine, in Orono, and a master’s degree in business administration from Thomas College, in Waterville. After a career in business, Mr. Rodrigue retired and pursued his longstanding interest in still photography. His photos have been exhibited locally and have won several awards, and his photo cards are sold at various local businesses. Recently, he took up videography and is using it to explore local history, another longstanding interest. Norm has produced two other videos: “Streams in the Seasons,” depicting the sights and sounds of streams on Kennebec Land Trust properties spanning an entire year; and “A Simpler Time,” about three contemporary downtown Augusta tradesmen – a milliner, a cobbler and a vintage audio/stereo repairman – showcasing early-to-mid-20th-century trades.

This presentation, sponsored jointly by the Kennebec Historical Society and Le Club Calumet, is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place, at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, 2017, at Le Club Calumet, located at 334 West River Road in Augusta.



President's Message

Those of us who reside in the Northeastern United States had an eventful last couple of weeks weather-wise. It was the most snow in (whatever location) since we have been keeping records. Whose records and who was keeping them? Were they only NOAA records, radio or TV stations, or local weather observers?

If you have had relatives or friends who kept long-term diaries or journals, then most likely, if you have access to them, you have a history of the weather. I had an aunt who kept a 50-years-plus diary, and some days, the only thing recorded was the weather. In central Maine we can look to Martha Ballard's diary for what the weather was, and the Civil War diaries I have read contain weather reports. Has anyone done a study of old diaries re: weather? These are just some ponderings, with no answers.

Valentine's Day has come and gone. Can spring be far away?

— Kent London

KHS "Knitting With a Purpose" Knitting Group

We started our January meeting with a Ladies Tea Party, which included a vegetable spread tea sandwich, a mini-quiche, a lemon curd/raspberry mini-tart, and, of course, tea.

We welcomed a new member, Jane Thompson, a knitter a long time ago who decided it was time to get back into knitting. We are glad she joined us.

The February meeting was postponed twice – first because of a snowstorm, then again because of another emergency – and will be held in March, on a date yet to be announced. It will be a "scrap bustin'" meeting. If you are a knitter, you know that you always have leftover yarn from previous knitting projects. At this meeting we will bring those leftover yarn balls to exchange with those who could use them to finish up a knitting project.

We already have a number of hats and mittens to take to CMP and WIC – still in time to warm hands and heads of schoolchildren who will receive them.

There can never be too many knitters for this worthwhile charitable group, so if you'd like to join us, contact me, Kathy Kirkham, at 623-0417 or email me hoosiersinmaine@aol.com. We are a fun group to knit with.



Stay warm and keep knitting,
— Kathy Kirkham

107 Winthrop Street – What We Have Done In Ten Years

February 28 marks the 10th anniversary of the purchase of KHS headquarters – the Henry Weld Fuller Jr. House at 107 Winthrop Street in Augusta. On that date in 2007, then Vice President Ernest Plummer signed the papers to buy the house, which included a substantial mortgage. Much has changed with the building since that date. The final mortgage was paid off September 13, 2012. Needed repairs, updates to make the building fit the society's mission, and restoration of its historic presentation have been done. We are fortunate to have photographs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries to inform the restoration work.

Here is a review of what has happened to the building since then and of plans for upcoming work.

Immediately after purchase from the American Baptist Churches of Maine, work was done to reconfigure the kitchen space and the upstairs apartment space. Two upstairs rooms were turned into a climate-controlled

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archive for housing our historic documents. This is a critical part of the building because it keeps the temperature and humidity in the correct ranges to ensure stability for the documents, photographs, and maps in our collection. The downstairs kitchen space was reconfigured into a small kitchen and a room that serves as our library. A downstairs bathroom was installed. Other work included re-wiring, adding insulation, installing a sprinkler system, installing a new furnace system, and adding a security system. A new driveway on the west side of the building was put in shortly afterward. The society opened for public use March 2008 in our permanent home after many years of being housed in different locations.

Work that followed the initial preparation of the space included a new roof, rain gutters, additional re-wiring and replacement of lights in various rooms, cleaning the garage and basement of decaying and unused materials, and finishing installation of all insulation.

Recent work has included painting the downstairs rooms. This was a lengthy process that included first identifying the colors to use (Historic New England's palette of 19th-century colors served us well here) and hiring the painters. The old wallpaper from some point in the mid-20th century was removed and the walls painted in colors from the mid- to late 19th century. The Reading Room is now beige and brown, the Fuller Parlor and west parlor are both a willowy green, the hallway is harvest straw yellow, and the small office/sun room is an aqua blue. During this restoration phase, reproduction overhead light fixtures were installed. They are reproductions of turn-of-the-century gas light fixtures. Other recent work includes installation of a dehumidifier in the basement, the installation of permanent internal storm windows with UV glass in the Fuller Parlor, installation of internal storm windows on the second and third floors, and installing LED lights in all light fixtures. A handrail leading to the third floor was installed because the space is now used for document storage. In addition, we have acquired some furniture and some significant portraits. A locally made Wingate clock, a library chair, and a divan were either donated to us or were found on site. The chairs in the Reading Room were upholstered through member sponsorships. Among the portraits collected over the years, two are of particular interest: 19th-century copies of portraits of Daniel and Suzanna Cony. Among the other portraits hanging in rooms on the first floor are paintings of Henry Weld Fuller Jr., who built 107 Winthrop, and his parents, Henry Weld and Esther (Gould) Fuller. Numerous photographs from our collection are placed strategically and artfully in various rooms, and the Reading Room serves as a display area for historic maps. Of special note in the entry hallway is a watercolor done by David Silsby of our historic building. There is much to see. Members are encouraged to come to our headquarters and take a tour.

The most recent work on the house has been on the outside. In 2013, handrails for the front steps were built. In the fall of 2014, the front porch on the east side was rebuilt. Then the society focused on repainting the building. After analysis of the sequence of colors that the building had been painted, we selected colors that corresponded to the last architectural changes to the building (closing in the west porch and adding the sun room), which took place sometime in the second or third decade of the 20th century. The building's colors were analyzed by a company that offers this specialized service and comparable colors were identified. The building is now Intellectual Gray (a medium gray) with Cyberspace trim (a dark blue-gray). Next on the agenda is restoring the external side of the windows, which includes repairing, re-glazing, and painting. The metal storm windows will be removed and invisible storm windows installed on many windows. More internal storms will be added to improve heat retention for winter. The shutters will also be re-installed. From the pictures we have, we believe the building had shutters up into the mid- to late 20th century. It will be exciting to see the exterior of the building return to its historic presentation. When the exterior is finished, it will serve as an example to the larger community of quality restoration of a historic building. 107 Winthrop Street is designated as a contributing structure in the Winthrop Street National Historic District.

Other outside work remains. A new building sign will be coming this year. We need to continue to remove the burdock that took over the north yard, finish painting the small porch off the kitchen, and complete painting the front east side porch. We also need to consider a new railing and proper columns for the entry porch.

All of this work has been financed through the generous contributions by members, anonymous contributions, and grant funds. If you have any interest in working with the Building and Grounds Committee on any of this, please contact the society. Contribution of your time will be greatly appreciated.

– *Phyllis vonHerrlich*

April Program – “Maine on Glass”

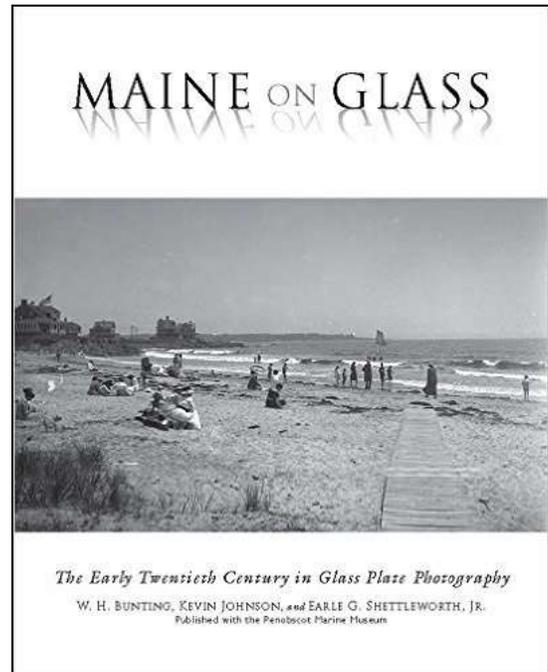
Nineteenth-century Maine — famed for its lumbering, shipbuilding, and seafaring — has attracted copious attention from historians, but early 20th-century Maine has not. The new book *Maine on Glass: The Early Twentieth Century in Glass Plate Photography* redresses this imbalance with 190 postcard photos and three of Maine’s foremost historians, all of whom are scheduled as guest speakers at the Kennebec Historical Society’s April program.

Postcards were the Instagrams of the early 20th century. On one day in September 1906, 200,000 postcards were mailed from Coney Island. In 1913 some 968,000,000 postcards were sent in the U.S., more than seven per person. The majority of postcards made at the turn of the 20th century were mass-produced lithograph or letterpress half-tones, but the Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Company produced “real photo postcards” in the form of silver gelatin prints made by exposing the negative onto photo paper card stock and developing it in a traditional wet darkroom. Eastern was the largest U.S. manufacturer of what it called “genuine” photo postcards. Images selected for the book were from 22,000 glass plate negatives created by the Eastern company between 1909 and World War II. As an archive of early 20th-century Maine architectural photography, the Eastern collection (now housed at the Penobscot Marine Museum) has no equal, and it gives us many unexpected glimpses of Maine life. Maine residents, expatriates, and visitors will enjoy hours of pleasure in this journey through Maine’s countryside, villages, and towns, guided by three historian authors – Kervin Johnson, Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., and W.H. “Bill” Bunting – who can bring a vista to life with a few well-chosen comments.

Kevin Johnson received his bachelor’s degree from St. Joseph’s University in 1989. He worked as a paralegal until 2003 when he decided to leave the 9-to-5 world to pursue a career in fine art photography. He relocated from Vermont to Maine in August 2003 to attend the Maine Photographic Workshops in Rockport, where he earned a professional certificate in photography. It was at the workshops that he first began working on the Eastern Illustrating collection. In 2007, he helped to rescue the collection when the pipes burst in Union Hall, where it was stored, which prompted its donation to the Penobscot Marine Museum. He followed the collection to Searsport, where he currently works as the photography archivist. He was a founding member of Aarhus Gallery in Belfast, and he teaches photography courses at Maine Media College, Waterfall Arts and Unity College. As museum photo archivist, Mr. Johnson has created numerous exhibits of historic photography, led student projects, and taught adult courses for the museum, as well as managing the museum’s 200,000-piece photo archive.

A native of Portland, Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. attended Deering High School, Colby College, and Boston University and was the recipient of honorary doctorates from Bowdoin College and the Maine College of Art. At the age of 13, Mr. Shettleworth became interested in historic preservation through the destruction of Portland’s Union Station in 1961. A year later he joined the Sills Committee, which founded Greater Portland Landmarks in 1964. In 1971 he was appointed by Governor Kenneth Curtis to serve on the first board of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, of which he became architectural historian in 1973 and director in 1976. He retired from that position in 2015. Mr. Shettleworth has lectured and written extensively on Maine history and architecture and has been Maine’s state historian since 2004.

W.H. “Bill” Bunting, who lives in Whitefield, is the author of several critically acclaimed works of history including *Portrait of a Port: Boston 1852-1914*, *Steamers, Schooners, Cutters, and Sloops: The Marine Photographs of N. L. Stebbins*, *The Camera’s Coast: Historic Images of Sea and Shore in New England*, and



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Live Yankees: The Sewalls and Their Ships. With Mr. Shettleworth, he also wrote *An Eye for the Coast: The Monhegan and Maritime Photographs of Eric Hudson*. Mr. Bunting shipped as galley boy aboard the brigantine Yankee at age 13 and later completed a 25,000-mile world voyage as first mate of a 132-foot barkentine.

When he came home from his first day in school his mother asked him how it had gone. “Not well,” he said. There was nothing about ships, nothing about olden days, and nothing about how things worked. He has been trying to fill that vacuum ever since.

The Kennebec Historical Society April presentation is free to the public (donations are gladly accepted) and will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 19, at the Maine State Library, located at 230 State Street in Augusta. Copies of *Maine on Glass* will be available for purchase.

Fuller Fund Hits Record Total

The Kennebec Historical Society’s Development Committee closed out its 2016 Moira H. Fuller Annual Fund campaign in February, having received a grand total of \$61,490 – the most ever collected in a single campaign since the annual effort began in 2008. More than 80 donors made this accomplishment possible. Money raised through the campaign is used to cover the society’s day-to-day operating expenses.

In Memoriam

John Knowlton Butts, 92, a former president of the Kennebec Historical Society, died January 30 in Augusta. Born in Concord, New Hampshire, he was an Army Air Force combat veteran of World War II and an engineer who worked nearly 40 years for the Maine Department of Transportation.

An Augusta resident who spent summers with his family in West Bath, Mr. Butts was active in KHS as well as the West Bath Historical Society and the Maine Historical Society. He was president of KHS in 1975 and 1976, at a time when, as he wrote in the July 1975 edition of this newsletter, the society had endured a year of “suffering the pangs of rebirth” and was adjusting to what later proved to be temporary quarters in the Kennebec County Government Center (the former Percy V. Hill mansion) on State Street in Augusta. Many years later, the society benefited from Mr. Butts’ services again, as an archive volunteer in 2009 at the society’s current headquarters on Winthrop Street.

Mr. Butts’ obituary describes him as “a humble and quiet man who showed his love for his children and grandchildren by building treehouses, jungle gyms and skating rinks. He was an avid reader of American history, played the clarinet and enjoyed jazz, swing and classical music as well as ballroom dancing.” His survivors include his wife of 65 years, Ruth (Williams) Butts; three sons; and six grandchildren.

The Kennebec Historical Society Welcomes the Following New Members

Barbara G. Warren – Benton
William and Karen Allen – Hallowell

David R. and Theresa E. Slocomb – Augusta
Patrick E. Paradis – Augusta

and continues to recognize our

Sustaining Business Member
Kennebec Savings Bank, Augusta

and our

Sponsoring Business Member
Pine State Trading Company, Gardiner

The Collections Box

Most of us remember the time when “social media” meant handwritten letters. We learned to write cursive, by making endless o’s and vertical strokes, perhaps with straight pens and an inkwell on tea paper. One of the delights of my job as a volunteer at the society is reading and transcribing both social and business letters in order to put one copy in the archives and a second in the database.

The social or personal letters provide insight not only into the lives of the correspondents but the social conditions of the age. Almost every letter begins with a variation of “I am well; how are you?” Life was shorter then, medicine was primitive, and daily life was fraught with danger. Until the arrival of trolleys and interurbans, unless you had a horse, you walked. Therefore, I find letters from Augusta to Hallowell, Hallowell to Gardiner, and Gardiner to Winthrop. Today these are short distances; back then, they were not.

And then there are the round-robin letters. One writes on a large sheet to a friend or family member who then adds his or her news, comments on the other letters, readdresses the letter, and sends it on. For example, there are letters in the family of the Rev. Lyman Beecher, co-founder of the American Temperance Society, that move from Henry Ward Beecher, to Thomas, to Edward, to Catherine, to Harriet (Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), to Charles, and so on through the large family. As many of the men were ministers, the letter was often simply addressed to “Rev. Beecher” and just the town changed. Eventually, after there is no more space, the letter comes back to the original author.

Business letters are just as interesting, whether they deal with either commercial or legal matters. Orders for shingles, lumber, nails, axes, and other material not only reveal what was locally produced but how far the product was traded. Legal letters may talk of estates, trials, or transfers of funds. Town clerks often write to each other stating, for example, that paupers in their town are residents of the other town and requesting reimbursement for their care. A bank cashier in Augusta might write the town clerk in Hallowell listing the Hallowell residents who have stock or deposits in the Augusta bank so that Hallowell can accurately assess its intangible personal property tax. A business owner requests an extension on a loan. A lodge officer writes to say that he will not be able to attend the grand lodge meeting. Local residents write to the United States Postmaster General requesting that the local postmaster be removed. Business, law, and politics: the life blood of our nation.

The authors of the letters in both categories also unconsciously reveal personal information. Clearly, some authors left school after learning penmanship but before perfecting their spelling and grammar. Vocabulary may reveal education or life experience. Even paragraph content and construction, if present, can tell the reader something about the writer.

In an earlier life, I read and transcribed literally thousands of letters, so let me pass along some things I have learned to help you with the family letters you may have found in your attic. Begin by reading the whole letter, skipping, for the moment, illegible or difficult sections to establish the speaker. What is the relationship between the sender and receiver, e.g. parent-child, lawyer-client, wholesaler-retailer, soldier-spouse?

Where are the writer and the recipient? What is the date of the letter? What is the reason for the letter? What can you say about the language used? Is it legal, business, local idiom, or military? What is the level of education of the writer?

Some illegible words can be made legible by simply trying the word that you might use at that point in the sentence. If a single letter is the problem, look elsewhere in the letter for the same letter in a word that is legible. Many writers in the early and mid-19th century were still using an earlier 18th-century orthographic style, so what looks like “ff” is really “ss.” Many times an illegible word is an abbreviation: “rec’d” for received, “shd” for “should,” “Jno” for “Jonathan,” “Colo” for “Colonel,” “ye” for “the,” and “inst” for “instant” meaning most recent, as in “Yrs of inst.”

I hope I have piqued your interest in reading and transcribing old letters and manuscripts. I think it a shame that our cursiveless grandchildren will be denied that pleasure.

For the Collections Committee
— Bruce Kirkham

Hartford Fire Station Horns

Often as I work in the archive office between noon and 1 p.m., I hear the horns blowing at the Hartford Fire Station. When I check my watch, I see that it is 12:30, an odd time to blow. According to KHS volunteer Joe Owen, the horns blow at 12:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. every day and have done so for as long as he remembers. He suggested that I write an article for the *Kennebec Current* about these horns and see if anyone knows why they blow at those times.

A great idea! Right after he said it, I went back to cataloging a part of the extensive collection that has been donated by David Dennett, only to find a November 19, 1992, *Kennebec Journal* article titled, “Why do those horns blow? Nobody really seems to know.” An interesting coincidence, which just whets my curiosity. According to the author, George Manlove, “No one seems to know why, not officially, anyway.” William Cusick, a Fire Department platoon chief in 1992 said, “Supposedly the 9 o’clock one was a curfew.”

He also reported that others believe they have been blowing like that since at least the 1930s.

Manlove confirmed that the 9 p.m. horn was for an Augusta curfew for children 16 or younger and that curfew was still on the books in 1992 but “has not been enforced since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned curfews on constitutional grounds years ago.” (It’s not clear that this is true. A 2011 article says there is an Augusta curfew that is enforced, but it’s from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.)

A few days after the *Kennebec Journal* appeared, the newspaper published a letter in response to it, which KHS also has in its archive. Here is the text of that letter (KHS item ID MANU_2012.0076.0246), dated November 24, 1992:

Fire horn spurs memories

Well, I can remember the fire horn back in the very early 1900s (Feature story, *KJ*, 11/19). It played an exciting part in my early school days in the Smith School on Bridge Street right opposite the Fire Department which was located where Pomerleau’s Furniture Store is now (I was born in Augusta on July 4, 1900).

A wonderful fourth grade teacher, Annie Connick (later Annie Sturgis), related well to fourth graders and allowed us to stand by the windows when the fire whistle went off at twelve o’clock and the beautiful white percherons that pulled the fire engine would dash from their stalls and stand pawing the air beneath a mysterious overhead rig that dropped fully rigged harnesses on their backs, uniformed firemen buckled about three hitches then jumped into the driver’s seat and grabbed the reins.

By the time the whistle stopped – just a few seconds, the horses relaxed, the driver dropped the reins and the buckles were released and the beautiful horses dropped their heads and returned to the stalls, and fourth graders returned to our seats – never tiring of this drama.

The whistle blew again at nine o’clock each night and we knew it was bedtime. Cast iron “alarm” boxes were all over the city and respectable kids knew they were not to be touched. A little glass door had to be broken to set off an alarm, and different sections of the city had definite signals that would be set off. A chart in each residence indicated which part of town was on fire.

During my school days I lived at 12 Spring St. and then for the remaining 30 years I lived in Augusta I lived at 44 North St. in a house my grandfather [A. T. Fuller] built – one of the first houses on that street.

He loved high spots in Augusta and in 1894 built Fuller’s Observatory, a wooden structure 150 feet high, which blew down in 1985. [Actually, it opened April 15, 1891 and was destroyed December 31, 1895.] It was about where the airport is now and furnished a magnificent view of the surrounding towns and even a glimpse of the Atlantic through telescopes installed in the structure.

**Majorie Lee Sewell
Liberty**

So does anyone have a better explanation for the fire horns?

— *Ernie Plummer*

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Type: New _____ Renewal _____

Category: Individual (annual) – \$20 _____

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Senior (60+) (annual) – \$15 _____ Senior Family (annual) – \$25 _____

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Life (1 person) – \$200 _____ Life (Family) – \$300 _____

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Corporate (annual, 25 employees or more) – \$125 _____

Nonprofit group (annual) – \$35 _____

Donation (optional): \$ _____

This is a gift membership, given by: _____

(Please send to Kennebec Historical Society, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582.)

This line and below for society use only: Date received: _____

Cash _____ Check #: _____ file 2.8.2

Reading Room hours: Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; other times by appointment

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