



History of Woodstock



By ELEANOR C. PARKER

Miss Parker is a retired high school English teacher, whose family roots are part of Woodstock's past.

As the old tune, "The Haunted Tower," rings out across the Oxfordshire countryside from the eight-bell peal of St. Mary Magdalene Church, Woodstock, in Old England, few people would realize that its echoes reach to a valley in the White Mountains of New England. However, a visitor to the church, parts of which date from the 1100's would see the name *Woodstock, New Hampshire*, engraved on a plaque by the tower door. When Woodstock, England, celebrated its quincenary in 1953, the over forty Woodstocks in the world, all named for this one, were notified and asked to contribute pictures for an exhibit and money for the restoration of the carillon. Woodstock, New Hampshire, responded and later received a recording of the carillon and a message from the Chief Alderman which was played at our Bicentennial in 1963.

History does not reveal why the early settlers of Woodstock, New Hampshire, gave it that name or whether they knew of their English ancestors. In 1763 when Governor Benning Wentworth issued the first charter for some 25,000 acres of land to Eli Demerit and ninety-seven others (Russells, Twombles, Hansons, Kimballs, Tuttle, etc.), it was under the name of Peeling. The grant carried stipulations of some clearing within five years; but since no settlement occurred, the land was re-granted in 1771 to another group and renamed Fairfield. It was then granted back to some of the original proprietors in 1773, again as Peeling. The problem was the impenetrability of the thick forests, but a road was finally cleared in 1793. Officially incorporated as a town in 1799, with the first town meeting held in 1800, Peeling had a population of eighty-two.

Since so much of the land is sloping, the first cleared farms were mainly along the Pemigewasset River. As the town grew, small mills, to provide needed materials, were built on most of the twenty-five streams within its borders. By 1854 there were fifteen mills including lumber, grist and textile. In addition to the farms and mills, people also found work at a starch factory on Eastman Brook, a tannery at Mirror Lake, and a lead mine on Mt. Cilley.

Strange as it seems now, a settlement of about fifteen families, led by Symms and Elizabeth Sawyer, grew up in the center of the area on Mt. Cilley, beginning in 1824 and lasting about forty years. Such was the determination of these pioneers that a school and religious services were established in this set-

tlement. A diligent searcher can still find remnants of stone walls and house foundations in the woods where these farms once stood.

In 1840 the final name change took place, and Peeling became Woodstock. No one knows why the change was made or why this name was chosen; but it was an appropriate one, coming from an old Saxon word *Wudestoc*, meaning "a clearing in a wood."

By 1870 the town had two definite settlements at the northern and southern ends, the population was four hundred and five, and Woodstock was about to enter its era of greatest change until the present day. It was becoming a summer resort with the lower village remaining rural and residential and the northern one becoming the business center.

With growing affluence, urbanization, and industrialization of the northeast after the Civil War, people in the cities began to want summer vacations. The beauty of the White Mountains was now widely celebrated by famous American artists, like Thomas Cole, and writers, like Nathaniel Hawthorne. All it took were Concord coaches with their fast horses and then the extension of the railroad from Plymouth to North Woodstock in 1883 to bring the tourists in ever-increasing numbers. Woodstock, in its forested, stream-fed mountain valley, facing beautiful Franconia Notch, was a natural attraction.

Within a few years many people began to "take boarders." Frank O. Carpenter's *Guide to the Franconia Notch and Pemigewasset Valley*, published in 1898, lists Parker's and Sunset Farms. Others were Fern Hill Farm, Osceola Lodge, the Birches, Seven Gables, and the Homestead. More famous were the



FACING PAGE—The upper village of North Woodstock from Sharon Hill looking North in the 1890's, with Franconia Notch in the distant background. The two buildings partially hidden by trees on the right are Beard's Opera House and The Hotel Fairfield. Sandborn's Store is the first building on the right, while Fadden's Store was located in the building on the left with the awning. **ABOVE**—The same view of Main Street as mentioned above taken four or five years ago.

"grand" hotels—the Mountain View, Deer Park, and Alpine—and the smaller Fairview, Mt. Park House, Hotel Fairfield, Russell House, Greenleaf (now a ski club), Maplewood (now a funeral home), and Three Rivers House (now the Mt. Adams, the only one still an operating hotel and restaurant).

People came for the whole summer, taking carriage rides through the mountains, walking and hiking (Carpenter lists the following natural attractions within the town: the Mummies, Devil's Eddy, Parker's Ledge, Grand View, Mt. Cilley, Ice Caves, Mirror Lake, Loon and Russell Ponds, Russell Crag, Agassiz Basin Balance Rock, Bell's Cascade, and Jackman Falls), sitting on the wide hotel verandahs, enjoying concerts and other entertainment pro-

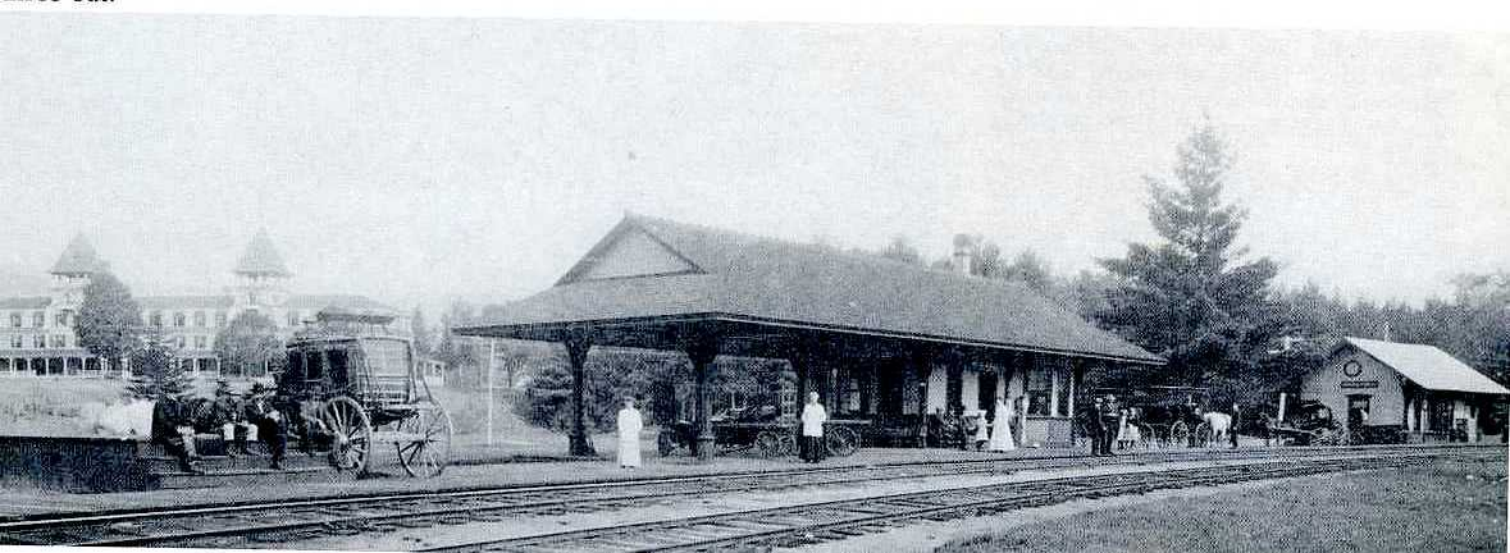
vided by the hotels in the evening.

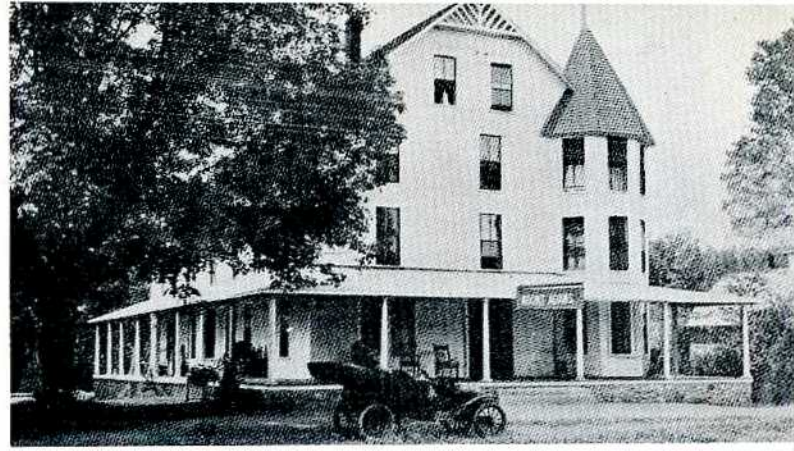
Others built their own summer cottages, the first being "Ferncliff," the home of F.O. Carpenter, who published the above-mentioned guide and loved the mountains so much that he requested his ashes be scattered from the top of Mt. Lafayette. Returning to the mountains year after year, these people, many of them college professors, became a very important part of the life of the town. A leader of this group was Dr. Karl P. Harrington, Latin scholar, author, musician, composer, and mountaineer. The two major cottage colonies were on Paradise Road and near the highway south of North Woodstock village.

At about the same time that many people

were coming to Woodstock to enjoy the natural resources, others began to come to use the resources. This second group were the lumbermen. The Gordon Pond Railroad and the Woodstock-Thornton Gore Railroad were in use from 1906-1916, making possible extensive lumbering operations. The Woodstock Lumber Company was active from 1906-1910. Although this work brought jobs and more people to the town, the indiscriminate cutting of early lumbering could have threatened the beauty which had attracted the tourists to Woodstock. Large-scale lumbering ended with the purchase of the large Lost River Reservation in Kinsman Notch in 1912 and by 1917 through the purchase of land by the Federal Government to create the White Mountain

BELOW—Waiting for the train in 1910 at the North Woodstock Station, with a stage coach and the Deer Park Hotel on the left. Until the 1938 hurricane, there was train traffic to the village. Earlier than this there were six trains a day—three in and three out.





In 1889, Frank Carpenter's *Guide to the Franconia Notch & Pemigewasset Valley* listed ten hotels to care for the needs of the many tourists coming to Woodstock. **ABOVE, TOP LEFT TO RIGHT** is the Alpine House (Now located on the site & grounds is Alpine Village consisting of townhomes & condominiums built by Bradgate Associates of Nashua), Mt. Adams Inn (The only hotel still operating as a hotel and restaurant), the Russell House, and the Deer Park.

National Forest. Although the National Forest is in many respects a blessing, it does limit the expansion of the town. Very little buildable land remains, most of that unused being either flood plain or mountainside.

Early schoolhouses were located at the south end of town. By the last decade of the 19th century there were two in Woodstock village and two in North Woodstock. In 1908-09 a new building was erected in North Woodstock (now the Schoolhouse Condominium) and the others sold. Previously pupils who wanted a high school education had to go by train to Plymouth each day, by 1909 it was costing the town forty dollars per pupil, per school year. It was decided to start a high school in the new building, a year at a time. By 1913 there were thirty-three pupils in a four-year high school, which finally closed in 1956 when the Lin-Wood School District was formed, and the elementary school was closed in 1982 when the Lin-Wood building was enlarged to include all grades.

The first church was organized in 1812 by Rev. Thomas Baker as part of the Campton, Thornton, Peeling Baptist Union, and the first building put up in 1827; this and a second and third building (costing \$1,000 raised by the pastor, the Rev. Benjamin Ropes) were destroyed by fire. The fourth structure, built in 1906 on the main highway, also burned in 1935. The present building, erected in 1937, was remodeled into the parsonage in 1983.

In 1850 a group formed a Freewill Baptist Church at the north end of town, its building

being moved about 1890 to the location opposite the Soldiers' Park and enlarged through a gift from the J.E. Henry family, who had built the paper mill in Lincoln.

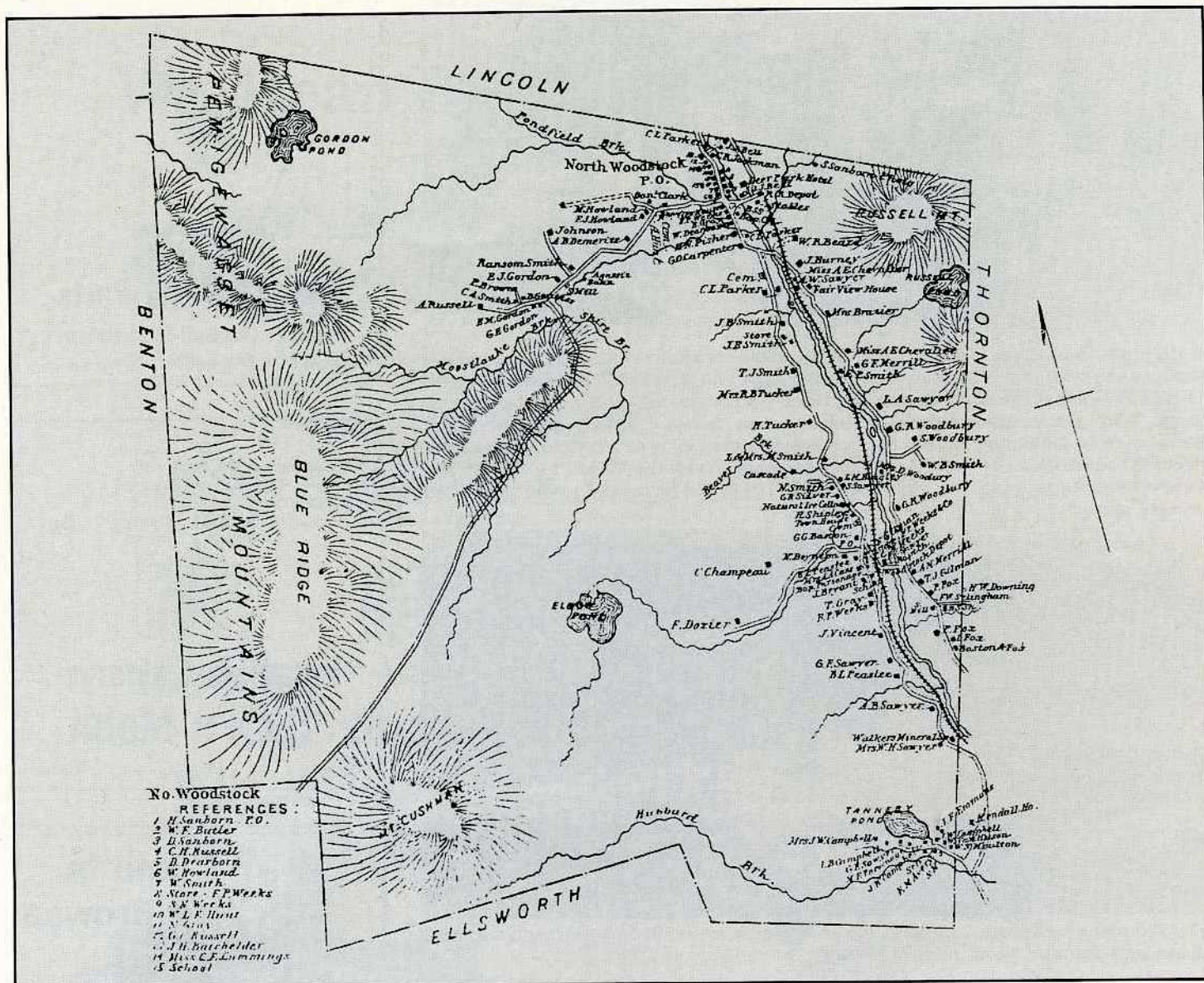
In 1966 the North Woodstock and Woodstock churches joined the Lincoln Union Church and the Thornton United Methodist Church to form the Pemi Valley Cooperative Parish. These all united in 1980 into Pemi Valley Church and built a new structure in Woodstock. The North Woodstock building was sold in 1983 to John C. Nofle, an artist,

BELOW—The Tally Ho Stage Line was still in business around 1910 carrying tourists from the end of the railroad passenger line in North Woodstock to the various hotels in the White Mountains. As early as 1840, professional hotel managers were on the scene.

who now calls it the White Mountain Gallery. The fine 1909 J.W. Steere pipe organ was moved to the new building in 1981.

The other church in North Woodstock is the Episcopal Church of the Messiah on School Street. The first Episcopal Church was organized and a building given by the Henrys in Lincoln in 1906. In 1912 it moved to North Woodstock, bringing windows and pews to the newly built church designed by Ralph Adams Cram, one of the world's greatest ecclesiastical architects. This church has a fine





An early map of Woodstock showing all the roads and buildings.

history of ministry, although there has seldom been a resident clergyman, the present one, the Rev. Carleton Schaller being shared with Littleton since 1962.

In recent years many ecumenical services and programs have been held with these two churches and St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Lincoln. Two very important ones are a Community Pantry and a program for senior citizens.

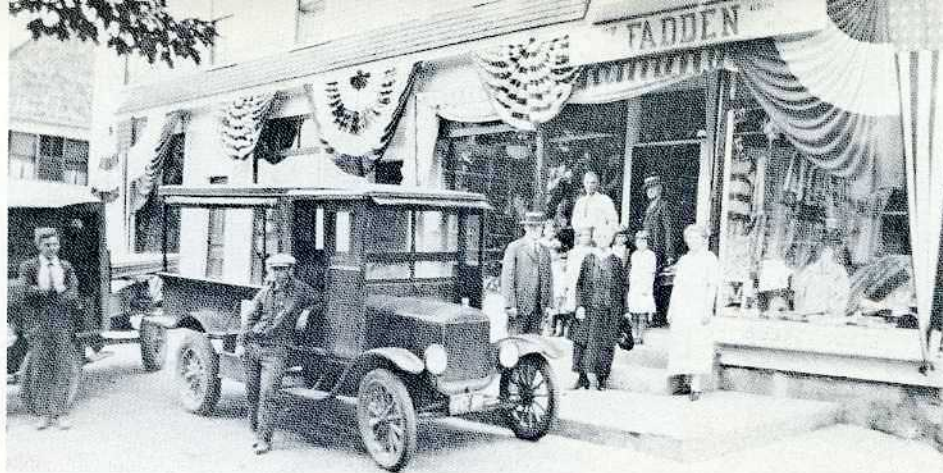
Since the lumber mills closed, there have been no mills or factories—other than a small woodworking plant. The only industry is the tourist business with the hotels being replaced by eleven motels, ten restaurants, six campgrounds, several ski lodges, and the latest—two bed-and-breakfast inns and two condominiums. With the coming of the automobile, especially since the '40's, crowds drive to the mountains in both summer and winter, with November and April being the only quiet months. The whole town is geared to caring for this transient group.

Other than the Baptist Church building in North Woodstock, there are no really historical public structures in town. A fire on

Main Street in the early 1900's destroyed several buildings including Beard's Opera House, later replaced by a movie theater, which is now Hilliard's Candyland. There are some interesting private homes, however. One of the oldest is the Burney Farm, once a station on the underground railway for escaping slaves during the Civil War, part of which was built before 1806. The only brick house in Woodstock was built by Benjamin Fox in 1828-29 of bricks he made himself from a clay pit in Thornton Gore. Although the Clarks came to North Woodstock in 1879, their home on Lost River Road was built before the Civil War by John Gray.

Every town has its leaders through the years. Some of the names are seen on the monuments in the Soldiers' Park which honor the men of Woodstock from the Revolution to the Vietnam War. The hotel proprietors were important men in town—A.W. Sawyer of the Fairview, Stephen Sharon of the Mt. View, H.S. Sanborn of the Deer Park, J.H. Batchelder of the Alpine, and the Russells of Russell House. Averys, Bradleys, Sawyers, and Browns remain well-known names in the

lower village. Sawyer Highway, Rte. 118, was named for Harry Sawyer, long a Road Agent. E.C. Woodbury, whose pine forest stands on Rte. 175, often spoke for the town and wrote under the pen-name of "Justus Conrad." Curtis L. Parker owned Parker Farm of which Parker's Ledge and the small cemetery were once a part. He and his oxen cleared the debris from the Flume Gorge after the great flood and landslide of 1883, which dislodged and broke the famous suspended boulder. He and his son, Leander, built many of the summer cottages and the dam, part of which is still seen in the river north of town; and his widow deeded the Soldiers' Park to Woodstock. The Hunts were builders, starting on Mt. Cilley and continuing with small hotels and other buildings in North Woodstock. One of their houses is the renovated and popular Woodstock Inn. Daniel Clark had a fine large farm and woodlots through which the present North Woodstock water system runs. In later years Fred S. Brown, historian, Scout leader, Fire Warden, active churchman, and reporter, was honored by the U.S. Weather Service for his years of faithful weather observations. Pro-



A 1926 photo of Fadden's Store (still in the same location on Main Street in North Woodstock) with James Fadden in the white shirt and Mrs. Fadden on the far right. Their son Norman, leaning against the truck on the far left, still runs the present store. With perseverance through hard times, James Fadden came to North Woodstock in 1896, and started his first store in the cellar of a building across the street. Around 1900, he moved the store to what is now the vacant lot next to the Swiss Chalet Restaurant. The Store burned in 1913, and he moved to the above and present site.



The Woodstock Lumber Company was in business from 1906 to 1910 and supplied many jobs for that short period of time.

minent until his retirement was Dr. L.B. Copenhaver, the only physician in the area for many years, whose soft Tennessee accent quieted many a frightened patient.

Women play increasingly public roles—Lena Clark, Town Treasurer; Ida Sawyer, historian; Clarice Parker, church leader; Fannie Muchmore and Thelma Joy, librarians; Rachel Fulton, postmistress; and the businesswomen—Daisy Conant and her gift shop; Maggie Signey and her ice cream parlor; Eliza Hanson and her fudge; today, Melvina Frank and her spaghetti; Anna Molloy with her news reporting and fund-raising; Joyce Clark and her dress shop and others.

Today's leaders include Selectman Norman Fadden, one of the first graduates of Woodstock High School and proprietor of Fadden's General Store, opened by his father; Selectman J.S. Hilliard, owner of Hilliard's Candyland Chain; Selectwoman Bonnie Ham, also President of the Medical Center Board and of the North Country Council; and Town Clerk, Deanna MacKay. Perhaps no famous people have come from Woodstock, but no infamous ones have either!

Today the population is over 1,000, doubling in the summer. Most people are employed

in the more than forty service businesses in town, though some work in nearby communities. Probably the biggest change in recent years has been in the relationship between Woodstock and neighboring Lincoln. Originally Woodstock was the old established Yankee town, famous as a resort. Lincoln was the small, new milltown, full of French Canadians. Now Lincoln is much larger and wealthier with the whole development of the Loon Mountain Complex, started by former Governor Sherman Adams. It has become practical for the two towns to carry on many activities together—the churches, the school system, the Medical Center, the Chamber of Commerce, the incinerator, the newly-formed Upper Pemigewasset Historical Society.

Some people worry that Woodstock may one day lose its identity. Of course anything is possible in a changing world. But so long as the newcomers seem to be as independent as the oldtimers and the Planning Board and Downtown Vitalization Committee remain active, it seems likely that the year 2063 will still see this little mountain town on the banks of the Pemigewasset remembering its old English roots and looking for ways to improve.

■ E.C.P.

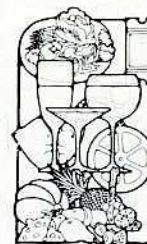


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