

“preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations”

# The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Summer 2009

## THE HOUGHS OF “PINECREST,” FERNDALE’S ONLY COUNTRY ESTATE: 1907-1950s

*Jean Spang*

Chickens, two cows, and a herd of goats in the yard; polo sometimes played in a side field; and an imposing 14-room house standing among tall trees, pines included, on a gently sloping hill overlooking the intersection of Ridge Rd. and Nine Mile Rd. These were the defining characteristics of “Pinecrest,” the only large property in Ferndale that has ever been deemed a “country estate.” Owned by the Willis Hough family for almost half a century, the parcel’s imposing brown house, even in its drastically altered form today, remains one of the city’s most recognizable landmarks, a lone reminder of another age.

Born February 17, 1864, Willis Hough, a native of Lapeer, was a harness maker who, early on, became a businessman in the harness and saddlery trade, ultimately owning the Pierson & Hough Co., Detroit, a company known until the 1930s as “the world’s largest distributor of saddles and harnesses.” In 1907 he and his wife Carrie purchased 30 acres of Section 8, Royal Oak Township (the present Pinecrest/Nine Mile site)--property formerly owned by Julia Luttenbacher, whose farmhouse stood at the crest of the ridge (Ridge Rd.) at Nine Mile. Hough moved his family to the property soon after, remodeled the old Luttenbacher house into two houses, later moving them to another part of the farm to house his helpers, and then, in 1910, building the present house on the knoll where it stands today.

Once established at “Pinecrest,” the Houghs soon assumed an important role in the community, even as they raised and sold chickens and Mr. Hough continued his business venture in Detroit. A member of the village’s school board beginning in 1912, Willis voted to acquire the 3-acre parcel upon which, eight years later, Lincoln High School would be built. In 1915, he supported the building of a new school, Central School, at Nine Mile at Woodward. He was a founder of Ferndale’s first church, the nondenominational “Christian Association,” which initially met in the Central School. In 1917 Hough, a prominent Baptist layman, purchased, in the name of the Detroit Baptist Union, three lots on the north side of Nine Mile just west of Woodward (site of the old Federal Dept. Store) for a Baptist chapel, a building later moved to the south side of Nine Mile, then moved once more to accommodate the construction of the present post office, and still later, moved again to west Nine Mile beyond Pinecrest (where it became the Women’s Club).

Meanwhile Mrs. Hough raised prize White Orpington birds, winning, in 1914, 2nd and 5th prizes at chicken shows in Detroit. (Her son Earle was the one who had to wash these chickens for their prize-winning appearances, a memory duly recorded in family biographies.) She also was active in the founding of the Ferndale Women’s Club.

The Houghs early involvements in the village’s real estate foreshadowed their major transaction: the platting of their 30-acre parcel into the Pine-Crest Subdivision in September 1917, which appreciably shaped the future development of the northwest quadrant of the village. They reserved two large “outlots” for themselves: The first was the northwest corner of Pinecrest/Nine where “Pinecrest” stood and a portion of the site now occupied by the present Ferndale Baptist Church. And the second was the parcel which is now Geary Park. They also renamed Ridge Rd. “Pinecrest Drive”--after their home, “Pinecrest.”

By 1921 Hough was part of a group of concerned residents who hired lawyers to declare the recall of the Third Village Commission invalid. Charges, proven false, had been made that commissioners had been slow to build streets, sewers, and lighting in the fast growing community and had misused funds in the process. Once resolved, the settlement allowed rapid development of the village’s infrastructure and the business and residential neighborhoods. Of special significance for the Houghs in this rapid growth: Chicken and livestock on private property was, by ordinance, prohibited in the village by the late 1920s.

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Mr. Hough always claimed that he was the last man in the saddlery business when the auto industry ended transportation by horses. His saddlery enterprise in Detroit closed in 1933, at the same time that the Depression was hitting hard in Ferndale. About to lose some of his property because of back taxes, he traded one parcel to the Ferndale Women's Club for payment of back taxes. He then started a food co-op at the First Baptist Church which had been built in 1927 on land he formerly owned.

By 1936 he had begun a new career as auditor of the Ferndale Co-Op, then in 1941, founded the Co-Op Credit Union. He ultimately retired from the insurance business to "live on his property," with time to enjoy his hobby of rowing. (He was a life-time member of the Detroit Boat Club and the YMCA.) A Library Board member from 1935 through 1952, he was then appointed as life-time Board member. The Ferndale Exchange Club honored Willis with their first Golden Book of Deeds in 1944, well-earned recognition for his key role in the development of Ferndale, dating to years before its incorporation as a village.

Carrie died June 23, 1942; Willis, May 12, 1953. They each are remembered for their devotion to community interests. But their most visible legacy remains the "Pinecrest" estate, and the street name "Pinecrest Drive." Two adjacent street names once honored their children: Earle St. (now Earl Blvd.), and Helen (now Withington).

Today, the majestic house, much altered, still overlooks Nine Mile, perhaps with a jaundiced eye. The pastoral scene of the early 1900s is gone, the sloping hill, largely devoid of stately trees, has been graded to make room for additions to "Pinecrest's" main structure for the accommodation of various offices. A "For Lease--Medical--Office" sign stands out front. And other businesses crowd nearby.

Yet, for some Ferndale residents today, memories still abide of a footpath winding around the hill upon which the original "Pinecrest" stood, a quiet place where the silences of surrounding wooded tracts and open pasture could still be heard. Recollections endure, too, of a small man with white hair who always sat in the front pew of the First Baptist Church, a celebrated community member recognized and respected by even a seven-year-old girl. Called upon to stand in front of the congregation to recite a memorized Bible verse, this young girl looked up, saw Mr. Hough sitting there patiently waiting to hear the "Word," his arms folded, a daffodil on a ten-inch stem tucked into the breast pocket of his suit, and, in frozen awe at the sight, she completely forgot the verse and had to be "rescued" by the embarrassed Sunday School teacher. What better tribute than this venerated awe for one of the icons of Ferndale history!

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*Sources: Information summarized from Maurice Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): 6, 27, 32, 48, 54, 76, 79; clippings from the Daily Tribune: February 13, 1949; May 12, 1953; May 19, 1953, in the Ferndale Historical Museum archives; Memories of Jean Stuart, Ferndale resident. Photo of White Orpingtons from Mt. Morris IL: Watt Publishing, on Oklahoma State University Board of Regents website: <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/poultry/chickens/orpington/white.htm> (retrieved May 29, 2009).*



The Hough Estate  
"Pinecrest", 1200 W. Nine Mile  
Courtesy of Earle Hough



White Orpington Chickens, a familiar  
sight on "Pinecrest" property  
early 1900s  
Courtesy Watt Publishing/Oklahoma  
State University



Carrie and Willis Hough on their 50th  
Wedding Anniversary, 1936  
Courtesy of Earle Hough

## LIVING IN FERNDALE, 1920s-1940s\*

Douglas MacLeod

Maplehurst wasn't paved until sometime in the mid-20's. Gas lines were also installed at that time. Until we got our gas stove my mother cooked on a coal-oil stove. We had an icebox which required blocks of ice for refrigeration. We bought ice from an ice house which was at the corner of Woodward and Lewiston. Later, ice was delivered from a truck. We kids would scramble for ice chips as the truck stopped on our street for deliveries. Milk was delivered to our home from a horse-drawn wagon of the Detroit Creamery Co. Our furnace was coal-fired. We bought our coal from the McCaul Lumber and Coal Co.

In our neighborhood there was a White Star gasoline station run by Elmer J. Rinz at the corner of Woodward and East Maplehurst. On the east side of Woodward between Maplehurst and Lewiston, Harry Roce had a grocery store. Across Woodward on the west side there was a Kroger store and a C.F. Smith grocery store. Next to them was Mr. Bazley's meat market. Frank Caram had a grocery store a block north of that. These were store front places, not anything like the large super markets. Then, around 1940 or so, along came the State Packing House big market on Nine Mile and many of these small stores seemed to disappear.

My father built radios in the early 1920s and we were among the first in our neighborhood to have one. Dad worked for Michigan State Telephone Co, which became Michigan Bell Telephone Co. in 1923. We were the only ones in our neighborhood to have a telephone, which was considered a luxury in those days. Neighbors would sometimes come over to use our telephone or to take a call.

There was the Ferndale Theater, operated by the Ealand family. On Saturdays the matinee always featured a cowboy film and we regularly attended. Admission was 10 cents. In the late 1930's the Radio City Theater was built.

In 1925 Coolidge School opened. My sister Mildred was in the first kindergarten class, I started a year later. Our teachers were Mrs. Swanberg and Mrs. Ball. A large addition was made to Coolidge around 1931 to provide for a junior high. We then had an auditorium, a library, gym, woodshop, and an art room. There were many vacant lots between our house and Coolidge and it was possible to get to school by following various footpaths. Likewise, we were later able to get to Lincoln High School by following a system of paths.

For a time in the 1930s there were drug stores on each of the four corners of Woodward and Nine Mile Rd. One, McMillan's, made way for the new Federal Department Store on the northwest corner. On Nine Mile there was a Ben Franklin's shoe repair shop. A young man named Steele, who worked there, had a sideline of selling model airplane kits. He would display our completed models in the shop window.

The interurban electric cars ran on Woodward from Flint to Pontiac to Detroit until 1931. We'd go to downtown Detroit to shop at Hudson's and look around, and take those cars. It was a fast ride until we got to Detroit, then it was slow going as we shared the tracks with Detroit streetcars. Beginning in 1931, and until 1947, Detroit street cars ran to Royal Oak.

\* Source: Summarized from "Memories of Ferndale," by Douglas MacLeod (three-page handwritten manuscript, 2009) in Ferndale Historical Museum Archives. Mr. MacLeod lived at 135 E. Maplehurst until 1933; then moved to 216 E. Maplehurst. He now lives in Dearborn.

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### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT THE MUSEUM NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!



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#### Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society

President	<b>Roger Schmidt</b>	Vice President	<b>Frank Flores</b>
Recording Secretary	<b>Christine Kole</b>	Corresponding Secretary	<b>Jean Spang</b>
Historian/Membership	<b>Lynne Prudden</b>	Communications/Publicity	<b>Lisa Harteau</b>
Board of Directors:	<b>Phyllis Hill, David Lungu, Eleanor Mielke, Mary White</b>		
Trustees:	<b>Ray White; Robert Bruner, City Manager</b>		

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**OLDEST STANDING HOUSES IN FERNDALE: 1901-1915 \***

<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Address</u>
1901	250 Kensington	1910	3326 Minerva
1901	781 Ardmore	1910	854 Pinecrest
1901	1841 Catalpa Court	1910	517 E. Saratoga
1903	505 Chesterfield	1910	542 E. Saratoga
1904	517 W. Hazelhurst	1910	1200 W. Nine Mile
1904	1529 Livernois	1912	853 St. Louis
1905	2616 Hyland	1913	270 W. Saratoga
		1915	181 Ardmore

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Source: Compiled from the O'Neill Ferndale Housing Resource Collection records, Ferndale Historical Museum Archive. Chief Researcher: **Diane O'Neill**. Additions/corrections to this list are welcome.

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**THE PLANE CRASH IN ROOSEVELT PARK, 1946**

*By Cecilia Belemonti*

On March 17, 1946, a two-seater SNJ Advance Trainer Navy plane spun out of control at about 500 feet above Ferndale, tore through power lines, and crashed into what was then known as Roosevelt Park, Pinecrest at Earle Blvd. (now Earl). The two pilots, Ensign Judson Berger, age 21, and Ensign O. Fredrick Hall, age 24, were killed instantly. Ernest F. Berger, Judson's father, who lived at 782 Oakridge, Ferndale, had seen the plane flying overhead, not knowing that his son was aboard. It appeared that Judson attempted to bail out; his open parachute was caught on the cockpit cowling and his body was thrown clear of the wreckage.

Judson Berger was born in Ferndale in 1925. He graduated from Lincoln High School in 1942. Commissioned on April 4, 1945 at Corpus Christi TX, he was placed on active reserve November 19, 1945.

Retired Marine Colonel William J. Rodgers, a Ferndale resident was instrumental in efforts to place a memorial in Ferndale for the crash victims. Thus, on Veterans Day, November 11, 1994, in Geary Park (which on October 3, 1994 had been renamed in honor of Donald Red Geary, who had served for 32 years as Ferndale's police chief), a memorial plaque was dedicated to these two pilots. It reads:

*In Memory of  
Ensign Judson N. Berger of Ferndale  
Ensign O. Fredrick Hall of Detroit  
These two air reserve officers lost their lives at this site in  
a tragic Naval plane crash March 17, 1946  
Love of country, Dedication to duty*

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Source: "Roosevelt-Gear Park Naval Air Crash, 1946," [Scrapbook compiled by **Frank Flores**], in Ferndale Historical Museum archives.



*Photos: Courtesy of United States Navy*

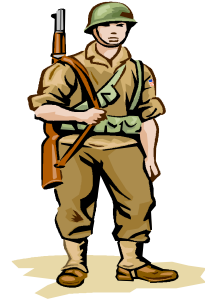
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## FERNDALE'S HAND GRENADE: A LIVE REMINDER OF WORLD WAR II

Former Ferndale resident **Chris Rodgers**, currently serving as a U.S. Navy SEAL, Master Chief, visited the Ferndale Historical Museum, April 29, 2009. A display of items donated by Ferndale residents who had served in the military during wartime caught his eye. Intrigued by a World War II “pineapple” grenade, he asked for a flashlight, examined the grenade’s interior, gasped, and accompanied by a now nervous museum volunteer, quickly proceeded--grenade gingerly in hand--to the Ferndale Fire Department headquarters next door to the Museum.

There, in quick succession, the grenade was examined, at a safe distance, by firefighters, a Ferndale police officer, and then the State Police Bomb Squad--who immediately proceeded to safely deactivate a World War II “leftover“ that still had sufficient charge to produce a significant Boom.

Whew! The grenade had been a popular attraction at the museum since the mid-1980s, intriguing to kids and adults alike. Thanks to an alert Navy SEAL, Ferndale’s grenade is now safely deactivated and back on display at the Museum, a real-life example of World War II--but also a stark reminder of the role of Ferndale residents in the nation’s history of the past nine decades.



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### BUILDING A HOUSE IN FERNDALE, 1926 \*

*Evelyne (Fetsch) Irwin*

*Lots were purchased on Emwill and Alberta Avenues--if you could find them on the sand roads. Autos driven out Woodward Avenue from our Detroit residence near Grand Boulevard and Woodward often had to be left at a field near Allen and Marshall and we walked through narrow paths bordered by sand-burrs and weeds to get to our properties. [House later built by the Fetsch family at 948 Emwill.]*

*Several “temporary” houses lined the streets, at the back of the lots. These were later converted to garages, added onto and moved up to the front of the lots for more permanent homes, and one, at the corner of Alberta and Livernois, even into a corner grocery store . . . .*

*“Outhouses” were in! Indoor plumbing such as a “potty,” and wash basin were installed the same summer, but baths were still taken in a tin wash tub. That year, a builder was obtained from Berkley, and the man began building the big modern house.*

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*Source: Evelyne (Fetsch) Irwin quoted in Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), Old Timers Tell It Like It Was (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987: 96-7.*

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### MUSEUM ARCHIVES: LOOKING FOR NAMES OF FERNDALE RESIDENTS WHO HAVE SERVED OR ARE SERVING IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Museum files already list names of Ferndale’s World War II veterans. But a complete listing of World War I, Korea, and Vietnam military personnel from Ferndale is still in progress. Staff is now beginning a list of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Please contact the Museum if you can provide names (and a short biography) of any of these veterans. By doing so, you will have helped immeasurably to document an important record of Ferndale military personnel.

(Phone: 248-545-7606; e-mail: [www.ferndalehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ferndalehistoricalsociety.org))

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**First Documented Structures in What Was to Become Ferndale: 1800s**

<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Structure Description</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Location</u>
1821	Log cabin (dwelling/later tavern)	Jabez White (a "squatter" on property owned by L. Luther & David C. McKinstry)	Ridge Rd./8 Mile (quarter section)
1833	Tavern/dwelling	"Mother Handsome"	Oakridge/Woodward
1837	Cabin	George Heron	8 Mile/Woodward
1840	Farmhouse	William Fulton	8 Mile/Woodward (40 acres)
1856	Farmhouse	Benjamin Parker	Pearson-Leroy/Ridge Rd. (80 acres)
1859	Farmhouse	Welcome Campbell	Hilton/9-10 Mile Rds. (750 acres)
1869	House/sawmill	Philip Granger	Woodward/near 8 Mile (24 acres)
1870s	Farmhouse	Arthur C. Porter	e. & w. 9 Mile/Woodward (“substantial” acreage)
1879	House	Charles H. Silman	Woodward/s. of Marshall (50 acres)
ca. 1870s	House	David Campbell	Hilton Rd. (80 acres)
ca. 1870s	House	Albert Campbell	Hilton Rd. (80 acres)
1890	House/grist mill	John Rich	Ridge Rd./8 Mile (20 acres)
ca. 1890	Farmhouse	Wilhelmina Anson	n. of 9 Mile/Ridge Rd. (acreage)
ca. 1890	House	Robert Robinson	w. Ridge Rd./n. 9 Mile (present site of Drayton Ave. Presbyterian Church)
ca. 1890	Farmhouse	Julia Luttenbacher	Ridge Rd./9 Mile (later Hough Estate) (30 acres)
ca. 1890s	Farmhouse	Elmer Knowles	e. Nine Mile (acreage)
ca. 1890s	Farmhouse	Anthony Grix	s. 9 Mile, Wanda - Campbell (acreage)
ca. 1890s	Farmhouse	Frank Grix	8 Mile/Woodward/Campbell (acreage)

Source: *Compiled from Maurice F. Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): passim. And the O'Neill Ferndale Housing Resource Collection records(Chief researcher: Diane O'Neill). Note. "Ridge Rd." is now "Pinecrest." Additions/corrections to this list are welcome.*



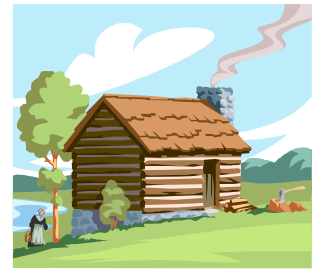
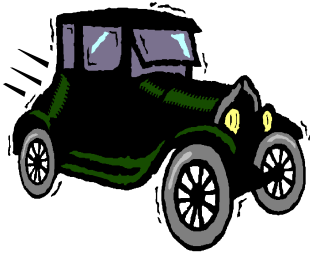
## THE GARAGE HOUSE AND SURROUNDINGS, 1920s

*Leona (Greene) Vance*

*From the interurban stop at Woodward and Marshall . . . we had to climb over two fences on Marshall across farmland.*

*We lived on the corner of Ridge Road and Emwell [768 Pinecrest] in a garage house built by Dad. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity until he built the big house [1928]--and no close neighbors. Nearest one was on Marshall. Ridge Road was a dirt road, deeply rutted. Dad could take his hands off the Model T and the car would stay in the ruts. It was difficult to pass when meeting another car.*

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Source: *Leona (Greene) Vance*, quoted in *Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, Gerry Kulick (ed.), in Old Timers Tell It Like It Was (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 120-1.*



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### WHAT'S GOING ON . . .

Substantial changes have been made in the Museum's appearance, interior and exterior, and in its organization in the past six months, thanks to the hard work of dedicated volunteers.

**Frank Flores** continues extensive carpentry work that has allowed for the installation of the Lincoln Mural, expanded interior exhibit space, and allowed for more organized presentation of displays. His alterations outside have made way for the projected installation, near the building's entrance, of a bench in memory of long-time volunteer **Victor Paul**.

**Lisa Harteau** continues with a complete reorganization of displays aimed at telling a consecutive story, in well-placed photos and artifacts, of Ferndale's development from its earliest days to the present. In addition, thanks to Lisa's skill in landscape design, the museum's exterior appearance has been significantly improved by the addition of ferns, daylilies, and boxwoods. **Roger Schmidt's** hard work has ensured that a new lawn has been started.

Maintenance of the Museum archives continues with the able assistance of long-time volunteers **Lynne Prudden, Phyllis Hill, Diane O'Neill, and Jean Spang** now joined by newcomer **Cecilia Belemonti**. The skills of **Betty Blank** and **Carol Schmidt**, who both recently retired, are acutely missed. (A special thank-you to each of them for their years of dedicated service at the Museum.)

Research projects currently in progress include **Theresa Schwartz's** meticulous documentation of Ferndale's Vietnam veterans' history. Gathering of information on local veterans who served in World War I, Korea, Iraq, and Afghanistan also continues. The photographing of the city's some 8,000 structures for the Museum's housing resource collection remains a key project, with **Lynne Prudden, Beth Breneau**, and new volunteer, **Robert Rose**, as photographers.

The Museum's well-attended annual open house, held on Memorial Day, was made possible by volunteers **Cecilia Belemonti, Lisa Harteau, Danielle Harteau, Diane O'Neill, David Lungu, Lothar Spang, and Jean Spang**. The Harteau's two Golden Retrievers, **Ted and Haley**, each wearing a "Ferndale Historical Museum" sign, marched in the Memorial Day parade with **Dan Harteau** and attracted lots of attention.

Requests at the Museum for information on various aspects of Ferndale history, politics, and family genealogy continue unabated--and remain one of the most rewarding aspects of working as a museum volunteer.

New volunteers are always welcome!

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**THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
ALWAYS WELCOMES NEW VOLUNTEERS!**

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**Museum Wish List**

- Volunteers
- St James Memories
- Saturday Workers
- Biographies
- Donations
- Talon, 1992, 1994,  
1995,1996,1997,1998  
1999, 2000

**CALENDAR**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Thursday, June 25th, 6pm</b>             | <b>Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum</b> |
| <b>Thursday, July 23rd</b>                  | <b>NO Board Meeting, Historical Society</b>                  |
| <b>Thursday, August 27</b>                  | <b>NO Board Meeting, Historical Society</b>                  |
| <b>Thursday, Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>, 6pm</b> | <b>Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum</b> |

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**The Crow's Nest, Summer 2009**

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