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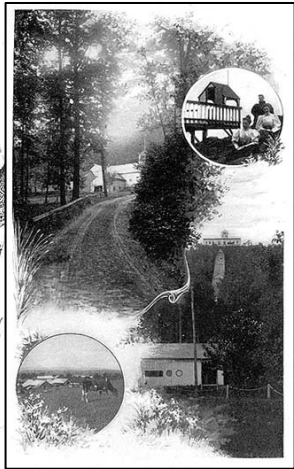
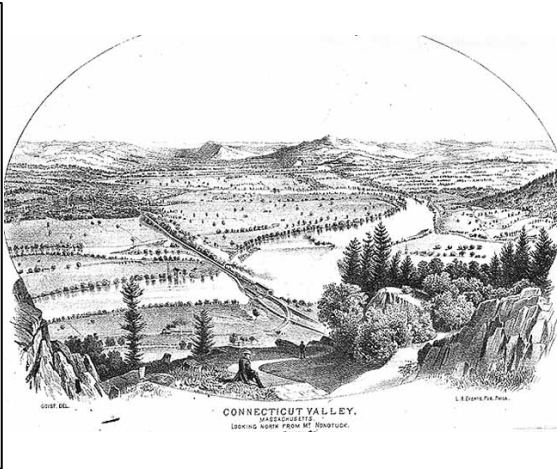
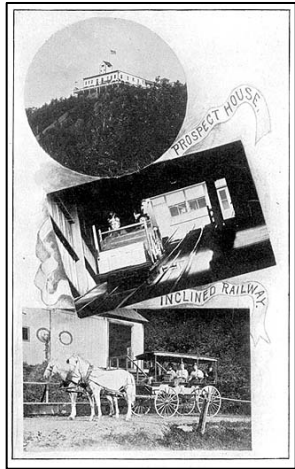
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The Happy Valley

Cassie Raker

On the Connecticut River in Western Massachusetts, there exists the Happy Valley. Surrounded by the humble Holyoke Range, today you will find a bustling New England settlement dominated by local colleges and universities. But it was not always so. The picturesque Mount Holyoke and its accompanying hotel, known as the Summit House, have overlooked the area for hundreds of years, watching it change from forest to farmland to industry to the modern landscape it is today.



Images courtesy of chronos-historical.org



“View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, After a Thunderstorm” by Thomas Cole, reproduction courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



The Valley was carved out by glaciers in the last ice age, the area is now dominated by basaltic rock.



Image from a History of Hadley by Sylvester Judd

Since the early days, the towns of the Happy Valley have taken great pride in their long New England History. In the 1800s, much effort was put into establishing genealogies of the oldest families, and important community members wrote multiple history books and guide books³. Residents saw themselves as conquerors of the wilderness, and interacted with the landscape as such.

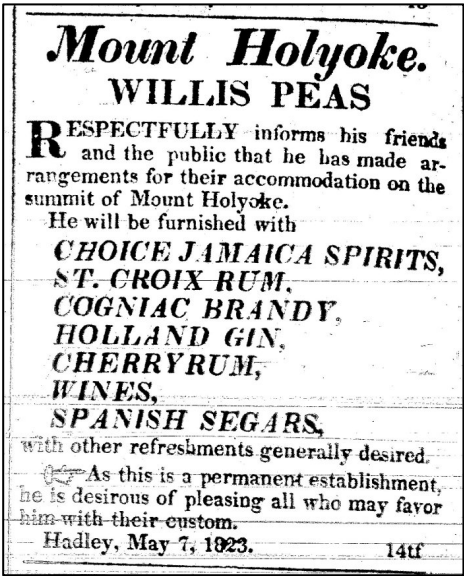
The Connecticut River was first “discovered” by Dutch settlers in 1614¹. The town of Hadley was originally settled in the 1650s. Church members from Hartford decided to settle upriver, and found a fertile valley next to the river. Starting as a small farming community, Hadley, South Hadley, and the general Connecticut River Valley were the picture of typical New England farmland². Trees were removed, and the flooding of the Connecticut River kept the soil extremely rich.

The Summit House

Before



Image courtesy of Skinner State Park



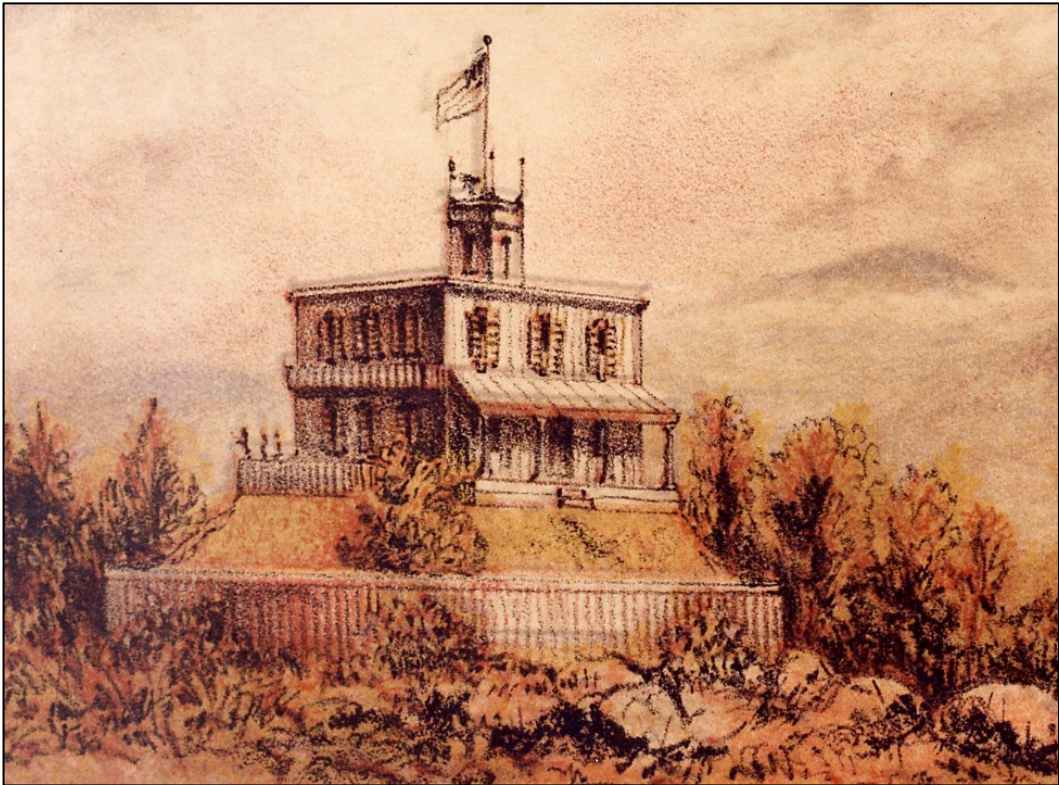
Menu from rival cabin, image courtesy of Skinner State Park

The summit of Mount Holyoke had always been a popular overlook location⁴. In the early 1821, local Northampton businessmen came together and raised the necessary \$120 to build a cabin at the summit. This destination functioned mainly as a bar, serving foreign alcohol and selling Cuban cigars⁵.

A rival house was built in 1822, funded by another refreshment vendor. However, this house was eventually sold to the owners of the original cabin⁵.

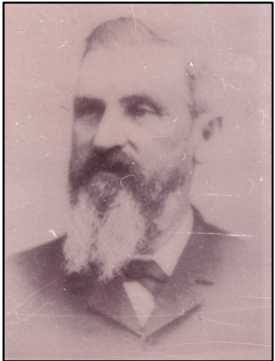
The cabin also featured a bowling alley, and presumably a fair amount of gambling. This was a place for local men to get away and embrace the wilderness; it was not a formal affair⁵.

After



The 1891 Summit House: image courtesy of Skinner State Park

In the later 1800s, attitudes about nature changed. People started having more leisure time, and began taking their two-week vacations at the same time every year. New England became a major destination for city residents looking to “get away,” and Mount Holyoke was no exception. In 1851 the first hotel was built at the top of the mountain⁶. There was a lounge, a dining area, and only nine rooms total. Soon a fence was built, and visitors were charged 25 cents to go inside, where they then received free water and use of the viewing telescopes. The Prospect House, as it was then called, was a Mecca of calm, leisure activities: nothing like the raucous bar of the past³.



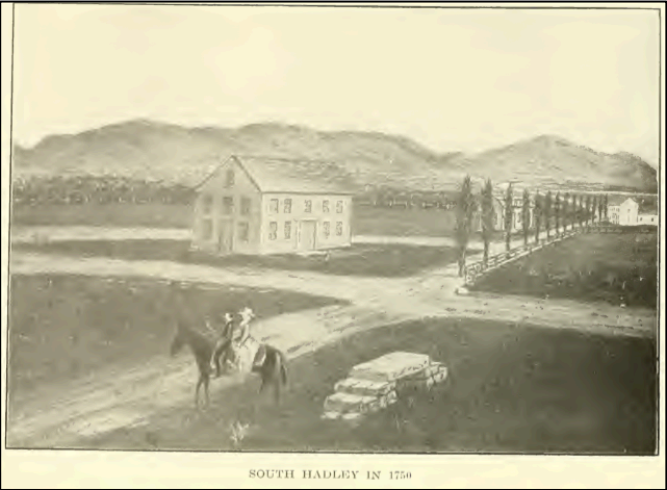
John French

John French was a local bookbinder, and bought the property in around 1849⁶. and decided to build a hotel. He and his wife Fanny were a part of the temperance society, and they served no alcohol⁵. After he died, Fanny took over the running of the hotel.



Fanny French

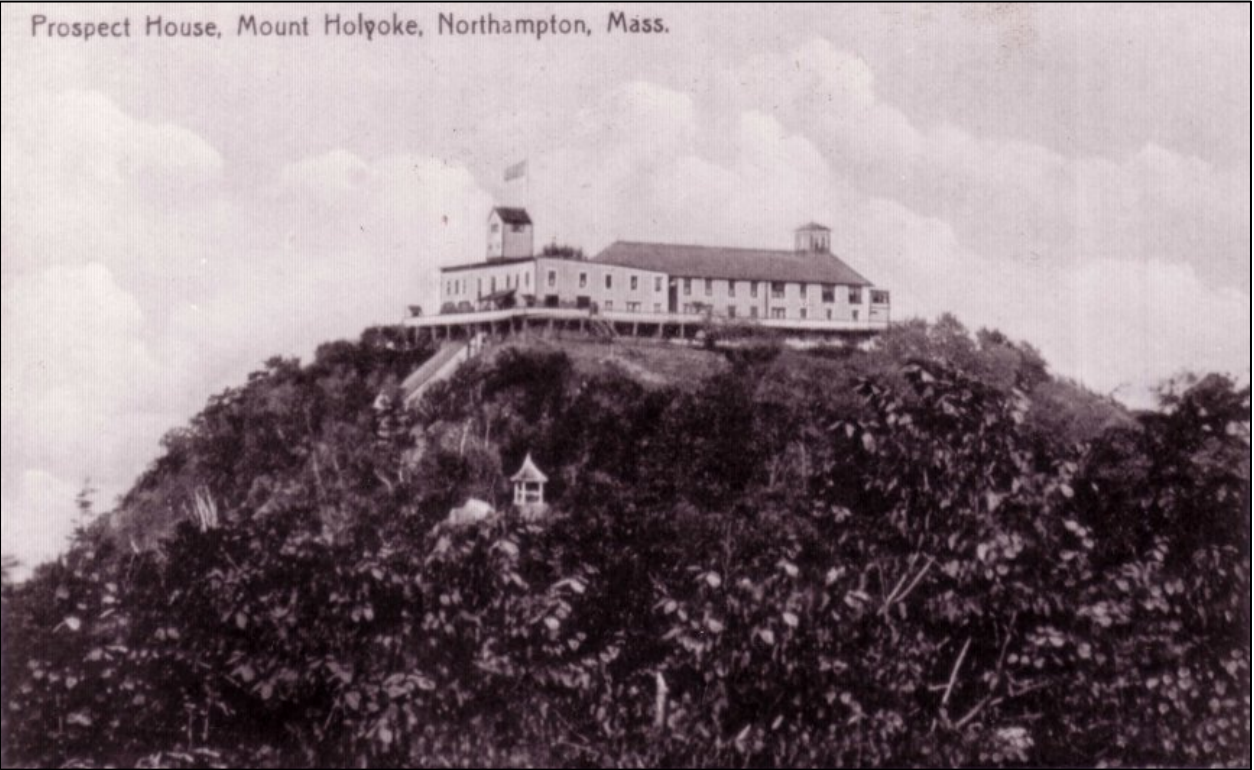
Expansion



SOUTH HADLEY IN 1750

Industry

The towns nestled in the Connecticut River Valley were starting to expand in population and industry. Straw hat factories became a major source of revenue, bringing with them a huge influx of workers and residents⁷. Factories sprung up along the river and its tributary streams, making use of ready water power.



The Summit House circa 1890s, photo courtesy of Skinner State Park

Additions in 1861 almost quadrupled the size of the building, adding 19 more rooms and a dance hall. Then in 1894 a three-story addition was added, including 40 guest chambers and a 200 person dining room⁵. Over the years, the hotel became a destination for many famous people, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and opera singer Jenny Lind⁸.



The Tramway

When John French build the Prospect House, there was not easily accessible way of reaching the summit⁹. There was a track for transporting supplies, and French soon modified this to carry people. It was lovingly nicknamed “The Old Sleigh” (shown at right). In 1856 French added another track and a steam engine to transport people up the mountain¹⁰.

It cost 25 cents to ride, and the trip took about six minutes. The tramway remained in operation until 1942, when the by then electric motor burned out with cars stuck halfway up the mountain. Today, physical evidence of the tramway has all but vanished¹⁰.

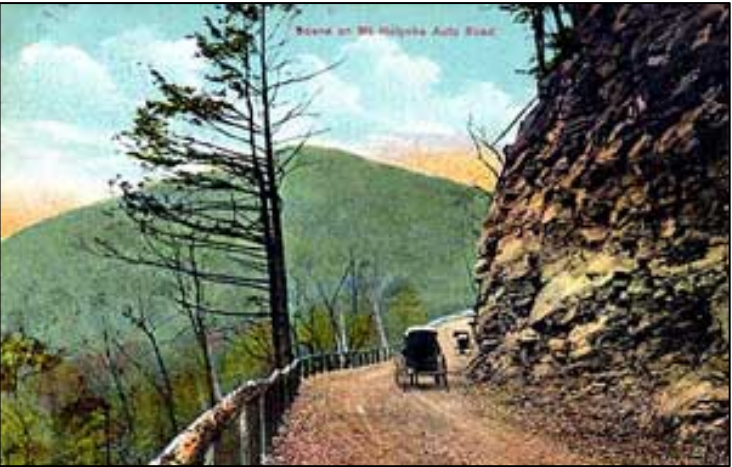
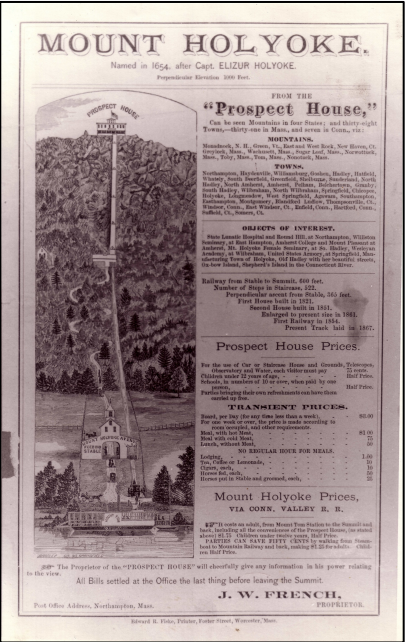
8 SUMMER TIME TABLES FOR 1867, COMMENCING JULY 2nd.					
CONDENSED TIME TABLE FROM NEW YORK TO MONTREAL, WHITE MOUNTAINS, AND LAKE MEMPHREAGOO.					
GOING NORTH.	Express.	Montreal Express.	Express.	Staten's from York City.	Express.
LEAVE					
New York, - - -	A. M. 8.00	P. M. 12.15	P. M. 3.00	P. M. 3.15	P. M. 8.00
Bridgport, - - -	10.15	2.30	5.14		10.33
New Haven, - - -	11.00	3.20	6.00	8.15	11.20
Hartford, - - -	P. M. 12.23	4.47	7.15	9.43	A. M. 12.40
Springfield, - - -	1.10	A. M. 6.00	A. M. 8.10	10.46	A. M. 1.40
Northampton, - - -	2.00	L. 6.30	L. 7.45	L. 7.45	L. 7.45
Greenfield, - - -	2.55	7.20	8.35		
South Vernon, - - -	3.43	8.04	9.23		
Brattleboro, - - -	4.17	8.38	10.00		
Bellevue Falls, - - -	4.45	8.57	10.30		
Windsor, - - -	5.40	10.00	11.40		
White River Junction, - - -	6.00	11.10	12.45		
Wells River, - - -	6.00	11.47	A. M. 1.15		
Littleton, - - -	A. M. 6.30	A. M. 8.20	L. 1.45		
"Profile House," - - -	10.15	10.15	3.38		
"Crawford House," - - -	11.15	11.15	4.40		
St. Johnsbury, - - -	P. M. 1.00	1.00	6.30		
Newport and Lake Memphre magoo, - - -	A. M. 4.00	4.00	9.30		
White River Junction, - - -	A. M. 11.10	11.10	4.54		
Montpelier, - - -	P. M. 1.00	1.00	6.30		
Waterbury, - - -	11.47	1.20			
Leave Waterbury by Stage for Stowe and Mansfield House, - - -	A. M. 3.00	3.46			
Essex Junction, - - -	A. M. 5.23	4.00			
Burlington, - - -	P. M. 4.30	5.00			
St. Albans, - - -	5.05	5.35			
St. John, - - -	5.40	6.00			
Montreal, - - -	6.00	6.00			
	9.30	10.25			
R. A. DEMING, Agent at Crawford House.					

Above: South Hadley circa 1750, pre-industrialization; image from A History of Hadley

Left: Summer Train Tables from 1867; image from Historic Hadley

Right: Flyer for Mount Holyoke’s “Prospect House;” image courtesy of Skinner State Park

Below: The carriage road to the half-way house; image courtesy of Skinner State Park



A State Park

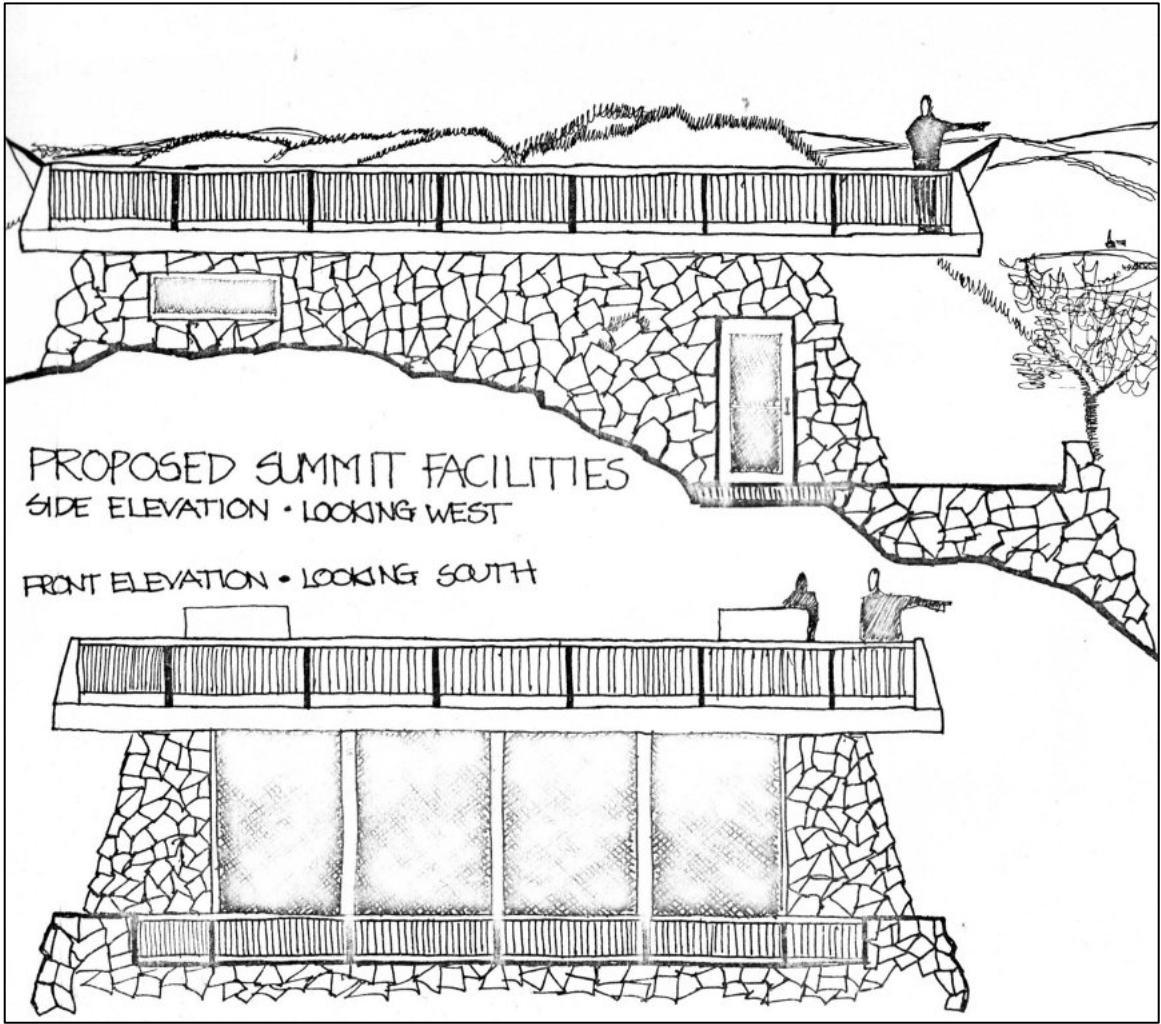


Joseph Skinner

In 1908, Joseph Skinner founded the Mount Holyoke Company¹¹. The company attempted to sell summit property to the state for \$50,000, half of its total worth, to turn it into a state park. However, the state was worried that they already had too much reserved land in that area (nearby Mount Tom also has a park), and refused to buy the property. Eventually, Skinner bought out the Mount Holyoke Company and became the sole owner of the property himself⁶.

Eventually, after many failed sale attempts, reductions in price, and a hurricane in 1939 that took out most of the hotel's 1894 addition, Skinner gave the property (with the now largely defunct hotel) to the state of Massachusetts free of charge. and on September 15, 1940, Governor Leverett Saltonstall named the new state park the Joseph Allen Skinner State Park, which it remains to this day¹¹.

Image courtesy of Skinner State Park



Plans for Summit House additions: image courtesy of Skinner State Park

The Summit House on the top of Mount Holyoke went under some necessary renovations in the 1980s to restore it to its 1890 state¹². When doing renovations, it was discovered that the entire structure was held to the mountain by a single bolt⁶! The house had fallen into disrepair during WWII, and community members eventually rallied behind a restoration effort.



The Summit House circa 1976 in drastic need of repairs; photo courtesy of chronos-historical.org

Visiting the Summit House Today

The second floor of the Summit House has been refurbished to its 1850s status, complete with room furnishings¹³. Today, you can take a tour of the house and imagine what it would have been like to visit on one of the most popular vacation destinations of the Victorian era. Recent renovations have made the building more accessible.



Photo courtesy of Skinner State Park

The Valley Today



Photo courtesy of Friends of Mount Holyoke Range

Culture and Change

Today, the Happy Valley is an area with vibrant art, music, and intellectual communities. The tourism industry of the past has transitioned into an economy dominated by local college students, and the revenue they bring in during the academic year⁷. As with many areas in New England, forests have grown back and farming has declined. But the Connecticut River Valley still grows some of the best asparagus and sweet corn, and people try to maintain a strong connection to the land.

Mount Holyoke College

Mount Holyoke College still enjoys a close relationship with the mountain for which it was named. Every year on one of the first warm days of the fall classes are canceled and the entire student body heads outside to experience the local landscape.¹⁵

Other local colleges, such as Amherst, Hampshire, Smith, and UMass, enjoy the park as well.



Photo courtesy of the Mount Holyoke College Club of Puget Sound

Landscape

From the top of Mount Holyoke you can still see the spectacular view of the whole valley, although the view probably looks a little different than it did when the first cabin was built. The local community is still extremely involved in events and engagement with the land, planning events and volunteering with restoration projects¹⁴.

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