

Thomas Beale,
Régister.

31 Octobre —

1000 piastres de récompense
SERONT payées à quiconque arrêtera
PIERRE LAFITTE qui, la nuit
dernière, a forcé la prison de paroliers et
s'est évadé. Ledit **Pierre Lafitte** est de
la taille de 5 pieds 10 pouces, fortement
constitué, a un beau teint et les yeux un
peu de travers. On croit inutile d'en
donner une plus ample description, ledit
Lafitte étant très-connu en cette ville.

Ledit Lafitte a emmené avec lui trois
nègres, savoir : Sam jadis la propriété de
Mr. Sawza ; César, appartenant à Mr.
Lefebvre ; et Hamilcar, appartenant à Mr.
Jarnand. La récompense ci dessus sera
donnée à quiconque délivrera ledit Lafitte
au sousigné, qui payera aussi cinquante
piastres pour chacun desdits nègres.

J. H. Holland,
Géolier.

7 Septembre. —

Etat de la Louisiane. — Cour de

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEAN LAFFITE

The Laffite Study Group was formed in 1975 for the purpose of uniting individuals who share an interest in Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature. Members and associates receive The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a bulletin containing articles, documents, research notes and commentary. The Life and Times of Jean Laffite is published irregularly, as material becomes available and is approved by the Publications Committee.

The Life and Times of Jean Laffite depends entirely upon study group membership dues, subscriber contributions and donations to meet its operating expenses. Study group membership dues are \$6.00 per year (\$7.50 for those living outside the United States). Membership and subscription information can be obtained by writing John L. Howells, Secretary-Treasurer, Laffite Study Group, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston TX 77043.

Please address all manuscripts and queries concerning LTJL to the Managing Editor: Robert C. Vogel, Department of Geography, 414 Social Science Building, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis MN 55455.

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The Life and Times of Jean Laffite Number 5 (May, 1980)

Dedicated to the memory of Ray M. Thompson
Author of The Land of Lafitte the Pirate;
charter member of the Laffite Study Group.

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The Laffite Study Group, 1975-1980

By Robert C. Vogel

The idea of a Laffite Study Group evolved out of the voluminous and oftentimes eclectic correspondence between Jane Lucas DeGrummond, John L. Howells, Sue Thompson and Robert C. Vogel during the early 1970's. In the autumn of 1975 it was decided to proceed with plans for publication of a series of occasional papers focused on Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature. Entitled The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, the first installment saw the light of day early in 1976, in time for the Louisiana Historical Association meetings in Lafayette.

I have before me the original list of subscribers for the first number of The Life and Times of Jean Laffite. The charter members of the Laffite Study Group were: Dr. Jane Lucas DeGrummond, professor of history at Louisiana State University; Pamela Grunewald (Keyes), then a student at Northeastern A & M Junior College, Miami, Oklahoma; John L. Howells, well-known avocational historian from Houston; Frederick J. Stielow, then a graduate student in history at the University of Indiana; Betsy Swanson, photo-journalist, New Orleans; Ray and Sue Thompson, journalists, Gulfport, Mississippi; Robert C. Vogel, graduate student in geography at the University of Minnesota; Dr. Harris Gaylord Warren, historian, then resident in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Rosenberg Library (Larry Wygant, archivist) in Galveston.

Five years later, the membership rolls contain the names of two score individuals and a dozen institutions in several of the United States, Mexico, Panama and Great Britain. In 1980, as in 1975, the "hard core" members of the Laffite Study Group are mostly historians and folklorists, with a sprinkling of journalists, genealogists, literati and treasure hunters. As a group they account for a considerable portion of the historical literature on Laffite and his associates published in the last forty years -- The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans, The Sword Was Their Passport, Abordajes: Biografia Esquemática de Renato Beluche, The Land of Lafitte the Pirate, Los Piratas Lafitte, Historic Jefferson Parish: From Shore to Shore.

A number of prominent libraries, archives and learned societies are associates of the Laffite Study Group. These include: the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Louisiana State Museum, the Louisiana Folklife Center and our old friend, the Rosenberg Library.

Current research interests among members of the study group include the Laffite Journals controversy, the impact of Baratarian smuggling on the Louisiana economy, privateersmen and filibusters at

Galveston, treasure lore and Jean Laffite as a major character in American fiction. A comprehensive bibliography of the brothers Laffite and their associates is in the works; also archaeological investigations in the Barataria Bay region.

A Laffite Study Group Research Collection, consisting of publications, research notes, documents and correspondence, is being assembled out of the private files of a number of Laffite aficionados. It is hoped that these materials will be deposited in a major research facility sometime in 1981.

The sixth installment of The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, planned for late 1980, will mark a milestone in the development of the Laffite Study Group. The entire bulletin will be devoted to the Laffite Journals controversy, offering both sides of that important dispute the opportunity to present their case. Individuals desiring to contribute papers, reports, documents or notes to this special LTJL are encouraged to submit their materials to the editors and the publications committee as soon as possible. All material published in the special issue will be copyrighted, with final drafts of papers and copies of all pertinent documents to be deposited in the Laffite Study Group Research Collection.

Finally, the reader will note that the present number of The Life and Times of Jean Laffite is dedicated to the memory of Ray M. Thompson. Mr. Thompson, author of The Land of Lafitte the Pirate and innumerable articles on Gulf Coast history and folklore, passed away after a lengthy illness at Christmastime, 1978. He is survived by his wife and colleague, Sue.

The Houma Indians and Jean Laffite

By Janel Curry

The Houma Indians have inhabited the coastal marshes of the Mississippi River delta since about 1800.(1) Their occupation of this area, which ranges from Bayou DuLarge in Terrebonne Parish to as far east as St. Bernard Parish, accounts for a great deal of the tribe's oral history and folklore about Jean Laffite and his men. In fact, the Barataria region is at the center of Houma territory and until recently was a major hunting, fishing and trapping ground for the tribe.

According to the Houma oral history, two of Laffite's men married into the tribe during the late 1700's or early 1800's. The first of these, named Solet, accounts for the present-day Houma family of the same name. The other, Jean Naquin, was said to have arrived at Isle de Jean Charles, the most isolated Houma settlement, "from the south, up through the swamp," implying a connection with Laffite's Baratarians.

The Houma folklore that has survived to the present day can be divided into two general categories: treasure stories and the Houma relationship to Jean Laffite. The treasure stories are very typical and are of a genre by no means peculiar to coastal Louisiana; they contain two almost universally repeated elements. The first is that the person who volunteers to guard a treasure is killed and buried with it. The second is that while a treasure is being dug up, silence cannot be broken or the treasure will sink back into the ground. Whitney Billiot related the following concerning the first practice:

"They buried money like that. When they came to bury money, they asked who wanted to take care of the money. Whoever said they wanted to take care of the money, they'd kill him and bury him with it. They would bury him there. That's why they say a 'spirit has money' -- I don't know. That person knew that he was going to be killed I guess. Laffite and his gang; it was them who buried the money. They stole and buried is what I heard."(2)

Many of the Houma claim to have participated in treasure hunts, almost all of which ended with the silence broken and the treasure returning to the earth. In one such instance several people used a divining rod to locate a treasure. As they started to dig, they heard and felt a spirit move toward them through the tall grass as the wind fell silent. Soon their shovels struck something hard -- but fear overtook one of the party, who broke the silence, whereupon the treasure sank back into the ground and the spirit dissipated. They continued to dig several feet deeper, but found nothing.

The oral history concerning the relationship of Laffite to the Houma tribe is not as extensive as the treasure lore; several of the stories are in fact quite unique. One such story related that Laffite came into Houma country looking for Indian treasure. Another tells the tale of Laffite and his Houma bride and how they named the bayous of Terrebonne Parish:

"Jean Laffite was married to an Indian, and her name was Marie. And when they had their first child, they asked, 'What are we going to call our son?' She said she didn't know. 'Well,' he said, 'We're going to call him Terrebonne.' He passed here [Terrebonne Parish], and he was a pirate. He stole money and killed people. Then the Indians went there to Caillou [stone], and they found a stone, a small stone. This place, they [Marie and Laffite] said, 'we will call Caillou.' And they said, 'We will call this Grand Caillou.' Then, they went to Bayou Dularge and found a bayou larger than the ones here. So they called it Bayou Dularge. And all these are in the parish of Terrebonne. That's why they gave those names; it was the Indians who went from place to place and gave the names to the places. And Dulac was between two lakes, so they named it Dulac." (3)

These stories are but a sampling of the many kinds of Laffite stories that are preserved in the folklore of the Houma, some of which are typical of the Gulf region and others with a unique Houma flavor.

-Notes-

(1) See John R. Swanton, Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of Mexico, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 43 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 282-285, and Ann Fischer, "History and Current Status of the Houma Indians," in Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (eds.), The American Indian Today (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 212-235, for the historical and ethnological background of the Houma people.

(2) Whitney Billiot interview, 1978.

(3) Jimmy Courteaux interview, 1978.

[Ed. note. Ms. Curry has been researching the culture history and folklore of the Houma tribe since 1977, including a year's fieldwork at Dulac, La., under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee. She is currently a graduate student in geography at the University of Minnesota, and is author of "A History of the Houma Indians and Their Story of Federal Nonrecognition" in American Indian Journal, vol. V, no. 2 (February, 1979), 8-28.

Contemporary Descriptions of Jean Laffite

Compiled by John Howells

1. Esau Glasscock diary: 1809

"But it was in the gaming-room adjoining the ballroom that Esau saw the Lafittes. Pierre, he recognized at once, and his father introduced him to the younger brother. Esau fell under the spell of his personality at once. 'He is tall, with pale skin, and he has large dark eyes. He is clean-shaven except for a beard extending party-way down his cheeks.'"(1)

2. William C. C. Claiborne proclamation: 1813

"John Lafite is about five feet ten inches high; stout made; about thirty-six years of age, slightly pitted with the small pox; has brown hair and black eyes. He has a little impediment in his speech; is a Frenchman by birth, but speaks tolerably good English."(2)

3. An officer of U. S. Brig Enterprise: 1839

"My description of this renowned chieftain, to correspond with the original, will shock the preconceived notions of many who have hitherto pictured him as the hero of a novel or a melodrama. I am compelled by truth to introduce him as a stout, rather gentlemanly personage, some five feet ten inches in height, dressed very simply in a foraging cap and blue frock coat of a most villainous fit; his complexion, like most Creoles, olive; his countenance full, mild, and rather impressive, but for a small black eye, which now and then, as he grew animated in conversation, would flash in a way which impressed me with a notion that Il Capitano might be when roused, a very ugly customer."(3)

4. William D. C. Hall: 1857

"Col. Hall found him one of the most prepossessing men he had ever met with, both in personal appearance and address. Lafitte was six feet and two inches high, and his figure one of remarkable symmetry, with feet and hands so small, compared with his large stature, as to attract attention. In his deportment he was remarkably bland, dignified and social towards equals, though reserved and silent towards inferiors, or those under his command. He received visitors with an easy air of welcome and profuse hospitality. He wore no uniform, but dressed fashionably, and was remarkably neat in his personal appearance. On board of his vessel he usually wore a loose coat with nothing to distinguish him from his subordinates. He spoke English correctly, but with a marked French accent that at once indicated his nativity, though it perhaps

imparted additional interest to his conversation. He possessed superior conversational powers, and entertained his guests with the rehearsal of many original and amusing anecdotes. He had a remarkable habit of closing one eye while in conversation, and keeping it closed so much, that many who had but a slight acquaintance with him were firmly impressed with the belief that he had the use of but one eye."⁽⁴⁾

-Notes-

(1) Lyle Saxon, Lafitte the Pirate (New Orleans: Robert L. Crager & Company, 1930), p. 11.

(2) Proclamation dated November 24, 1813, offering \$500 reward for John Lafite [sic] for "grievously wounding" a revenue officer. Published in Courrier de la Louisiane/Courrier of Louisiana.

(3) Anonymous, "Cruise of the Enterprize: A Day with Lafitte," originally published in the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, July, 1839; quoted in Saxon, Lafitte the Pirate, p. 249.

(4) Col. J. S. Thrasher, "Early History of Galveston," in Galveston City Directory, 1859-60; a mounted copy of this article is in the archives of the Rosenberg Library.

Notes and Documents

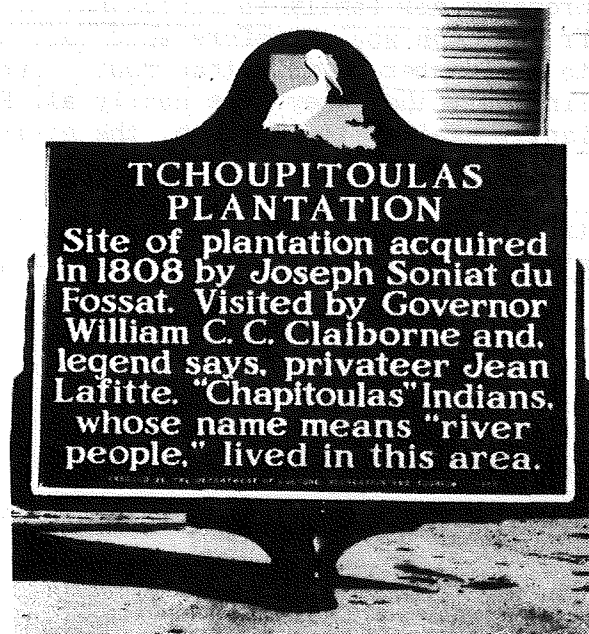
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park

In 1978 the federal government established the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in order to "preserve for the education, inspiration, and benefit of present and future generations significant examples of natural and historical resources of the Mississippi Delta region." Although the "core area" of the park will consist of some eight thousand acres of Barataria marshland in Jefferson Parish, the National Park Service plans to establish "extended area units" of the park throughout southern Louisiana. Big Oak Island, Chalmette National Historical Park and selected sites in the French Quarter and Garden District have also been included in the Lafitte Park system. James L. Isenogle, Park Superintendent, informs the editors of LTJL that the Delta Region Preservation Commission (the citizens' advisory group for the National Park Service) is considering various historical and ethnographic research projects, many of which will be of special interest to the Laffite Study Group.

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Historical Marker

On Sunday, 24 February, 1980, the Jefferson Historical Society of Louisiana sponsored the dedication of an historical marker at the Tchoupitoulas Plantation. The Laffite connection with Joseph Soniat is noted on the marker (see photo, below).



The Capture of the "Le Brave" Schooner

"In October, 1819, the Revenue Cutter ALABAMA, on her way to her station off the mouth of the Mississippi, captured a piratical schooner of 2 guns and 25 men, fitted out at New Orleans, and commanded by a fellow named LeFage [sic]. The privateer had a prize in company when sighted by the ALABAMA. The Cutter rapidly overhauled the stranger, who hauled by the wind and endeavored to escape, but the Revenue Cutter was soon within hailing distance and ranging up on the schooner's weather quarter, whose deck was crowded with men. The commanding officer hailed, demanding her name, and where she was from. A short delay ensued, and quite a commotion was visible amongst the men on board the schooner. Without the slightest warning a fusilade of musketry was directed upon the ALABAMA, the only reply vouchsafed to the commander's enquiry. The crew of the ALABAMA were at quarters, anxious and impatient to engage the schooner. The ports were thrown open and a rapid fire opened upon the stranger and a smart action ensued, which soon terminated in favor of the ALABAMA. The Cutter had 4 men wounded, 2 of them dangerously, but the pirate lost 6 men by the Cutter's fire. The prize was recaptured and both vessels brought into the Bayou of St. John. Many outrages had been committed by this vessel--she had a commission, in blank, signed, 'Humbert, Governor of Texas.'" (From Horatio Davis Smith's Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service . . . 1789-1849, p. 33.)

* * * * *

"...and gold alone was their religion..."

In a pamphlet published in 1848, Bernard Marigny sought to defend the honor of Louisiana's Creole population, whose role in the Battle of New Orleans had been belittled by Anglo-American historians. Among the numerous examples of Creole patriotism and bravery are a number of references to the Baratarians and their Mexican revolutionary compatriots.

"The French and the naturalized citizens of all nations covered themselves with glory," wrote the author of Reflections on the Campaign of General Andrew Jackson In Louisiana in 1814 and '15. "Lafitte and the Baratarians, among whom were found some men of color from San Domingo, though they had no property nor family in Louisiana and gold alone was their religion, their god, men who therefore were called pirates, Lafitte and his companions to the number of more than 800, refused the gold of England and remembering only that they were nearly all Frenchmen, they came and fought valiantly against the English, the eternal enemies of France."

An English translation of this remarkable little work appeared in the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, vol. VI (January, 1923).

R. C. V.

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History of the U. S. Schooner "Firebrand"

The United States Schooner Firebrand was purchased into federal

service at New Orleans in April, 1815, for three thousand and fifty dollars. Seventy feet in length, with a twenty-one foot beam, the vessel drew about ten feet of water aft; she was rated a crew of fifty-two officers and men and carried seven guns (one long six pounder and six six pounder carronades). Firebrand was placed under the command of Lieutenant T. S. Cunningham and sailed on her first cruise in August, 1815, to protect commerce from pirates and to enforce the revenue laws. During the next four years, Firebrand made intermittent cruises in the Gulf of Mexico, attached to the New Orleans naval station, commanded by Daniel T. Patterson. On her first patrol she recaptured an American and a Spanish vessel from pirates near Isle Cayes; a Baratarian privateer subsequently fell into Cunningham's hands; and during the latter part of 1818 the schooner captured four smugglers' boats off the Sabine and the piratical schooner La Maison. During the night of 28-29 July, 1819, Firebrand was wrecked in a storm while anchored at Pass Christian. Lieutenant James McKay McIntosh, author of the 1847 "Visit to Lafitte", was in command, Cunningham having gone to New Orleans; McKay was not on board when the vessel was wrecked on "Square Handkerchief Shoal" and was one of the dozen survivors. (This was written from information obtained from the Naval Historical Center, Washington, D. C., Ships' Histories Section.)

R. C. V.

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Old News Clippings

From the Salem, Mass., Observer, Monday, 27 January, 1823:

"Home News. New Orleans, Dec. 24. Trial for Piracy. The District Court of the U. States has lately been occupied with the trial of Andreas Roachi--.. This man was accused with having piratically robbed to the value of \$400, from a schooner bound to Campeachy which vessel he captured on the 25th of June 1821 . . . The prisoner had Messrs. Livingston, Davezac and Preston, for his counsel, and justified himself on the ground that Generals Long and Trespacios, at that time commanding in Texas, had authorized him to cruise against their enemies the Spaniards; & that the goods & the vessel captured were Spanish property. After a patient hearing of two days, the case was last night submitted to the jury, who in a short time brought in a verdict of not guilty."

From the New Hampshire Gazette, Tuesday, 20 March, 1821:

"Lafitte, a brother of the notorious Baratarian pirate, it appears, has been spending the winter at Charleston, as the agent of his brother, to procure supplies of men, provisions, arms, &c. In the course of the winter he purchased a schooner called the Nancy Eleanor, and put to sea about a fortnight since. The editor of the Charleston Courrier announced her sailing, bound, as it was supposed, on a piratical expedition. A Mr. Lemaitre, has published a contradiction to this statement, and claims the ownership of the vessel; but the editor of the Courrier still thinks he was right, and that if the schooner was not equipt with arms, and an unusual complement of men, it was owing to the vigilance of the officers of the customs--Com. Adv."

From the Salem Gazette, Friday, 2 October, 1818:

"Domestic Intelligence. War in Disguise! Pirates -- We learn (says the Savannah Chronicle), that the two Insurance Companies of this place have sustained a loss of more than 40,000 dollars in consequence of the robbery of seventy two slaves out of a vessel from the Chesapeake by a piratical sloop off the Barry Islands. This is only a solitary example of the injury inflicted on the commerce of New-Orleans by the numerous picaroons which swarm the Gulph of Mexico, the West India seas, and along the Atlantic shore of Florida. It has lately been ascertained that there is a band at Galveztown, which exists by piracy and smuggling. One of their cruisers, commanded by Lamaison, was brought into the river a few days since by the Firebrand; at the same time an open boat, with the noted Peter Lafitte on board, was brought in by sailing master Quin, in a boat of the ketch Surprise. It has been reported that the banditti who robbed the slaves above mentioned, have been caught and carried to the Havana -- if this report be true, we are exceedingly glad of it. But we are inclined to receive it with distrust; we suspect that it has been put in circulation for the purpose of lulling the vigilance of the officers who have been sent in pursuit of them by Commodore Patterson."

J. L. H.

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Laffite and the Occult

Ted Serios, an alcoholic bellhop from Chicago, claimed to have the ability to make photographs appear on film by merely concentrating on the camera. Under hypnosis Serios became a "travelling clairvoyant" and journeyed mentally to far-off places. "On these mental expeditions," wrote Colin Wilson in his 1971 book The Occult, A History, "he made the acquaintance of a spirit who claimed to be Jean Laffite, a pirate and smuggler who died in the early nineteenth century, and Laffite took Serios to spots where he claimed buried treasure was hidden. An expedition to Florida to uncover some of this treasure was a failure, and Laffite seems to have got bored with his new acquaintance, for he became more difficult to summon up, until he vanished altogether." [p. 509]

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John Lafflin: Famous American Forger

Charles Hamilton, the well-known New York autograph collector and author, is working on a book about famous American forgers, to be published by Crown later this year. The work contains a chapter on John Andrechyne Lafflin/alias Lafitte and the "Journals of Jean Laffite," wherein Mr. Hamilton relates the story of his encounter with the Laffite papers and their owner. A review of Hamilton's Great Forgers and Famous Fakes will appear in the next LTJL.

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Recent Publications of Interest

DeGrummond, Jane L., and Ronald R. Morazan. The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans, with Biographical Sketches of the Veterans of the Battalion of Orleans, 1814-1815. Baton Rouge: Legacy Publishing Company, 1980. A re-print of Dr. DeGrummond's well-known Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1961 and 1968) with a most useful addenda, published seperately (see below).

Morazan, Ronald R. Biographical Sketches of the Veterans of the Battalion of Orleans, 1814-1815. Baton Rouge: Legacy Publishing Company, 1980.

Sugden, John. "Jean Lafitte and the British Offer of 1814." Louisiana History Vol. XX, No. 2 (Spring, 1979), 159-167. An excellent recounting of the British intrigue with the Baratarians, drawing heavily upon primary source materials in British repositories.

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At the Theatre

"The Saga of Jean Lafitte, as Danced and Dreamt by Karl Marx," a dance drama by James Clouser, made its world premiere at Houston's Equinox Theatre & Space/Dance/Theatre, April 19-May 12, 1978. Based more or less on the Journal of Jean Laffite, according to the director, the action of this dance/drama is "dream like . . . Marx enters the action of Lafitte's life and sometimes acts as Lafitte himself." The gentleman privateer is presented as a patriot, liberator and "ancointed idealist" whose encounter with Marx in 1848 engendered a biography of a forgotten hero as well as a communist manifesto.

Rumor has it that the nine-member cast of the "Saga of Jean Lafitte" completed their run at the Equinox, burned their commune to the ground and sailed away on their piratical schooner, The Pride, to an unknown end.

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