

U.S. HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION PROGRAMS: HISTORY, OUTLOOK, AND ROLES

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Abstract:

The Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) began with the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) in 1933 and grew into four parallel programs by 2000. Sanctioned by 1935 Historic Sites Act and continue to flourish under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, these units deal with demarcated classes of heritage resources. Although the Programs' processes and products are fairly known, some attributes of the Programs, including development history, documentation outlook, and the roles they play, are not as much known. Disyphering unexplored attributes of HDP will reveal information that tend to articulate the Programs' character and performance. Therefore, this study had set out to trace the Programs' evolution and development; examine the Programs' outlook and strategies; and, explain the Programs' roles in discharging their responsibilities. Drawing to a degree on the National Park Service literature on HDP and on preservation in general, this paper has resulted in new information about HDP. The paper concluded that a) the country's amenable disposition for embarking on a conservation movement played a role in developing what became known Heritage Documentation Programs; b) the interval emergence of the Programs indicates the developed need for attending to distinct segments of heritage resources, thus echoing a wholistic outlook at heritage and its conservation; c) HDP respond to the federal mandate through a number of roles that transcend the technical performance of documentation to the educational, cultural, and curatorial purposes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) are a well-established entity in the National Park Service (NPS), the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior entrusted with the National Historic Preservation Program. The HDP consist of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), the oldest federal preservation program in the country, in addition to the subsequently created Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS), and Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems (CRGIS). Born at different times out of common as well as distinctive reasons of their own, these units deal with demarcated classes of heritage resources: HABS deals with architectural resources, HAER deals with engineering and industrial resources, and HALS deals with vernacular and designed landscape resources. CRGIS is somehow different in that it focuses on digital documentation methodologies, such as the Geographic Information System and Global Positioning System, to record and compile data typically for large cultural areas of land. The basis of the HDP goes back to the Historic Sites Act of 1935 in which the National Park Service had been empowered to "secure, collate, and preserve drawings, plans, photographs, and other data of historic and archaeological sites, buildings, and objects"[1]. These four units side by side a horde of heritage identification and conservation programs in the NPS—including the National Register of Historic Places, the National Heritage Areas, and the Historic Preservation Planning—coalesce to implement the National Historic Preservation Program mandated by the landmark legislation National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The HDP, the subject of this paper, have evolved gradually over six decades each building on the documentation knowledge at the time and, in turn, contributing to the development of the heritage documentation field.

Heritage Documentation Programs are known commonly by their processes and products (Figure 1). Besides vagueness of the term “heritage”[2] in the HDP name fold, there are attributes of the programs that have not been explored, or little explored, if any. For example, in their evolution as well as continued development, the Programs endured forces and challenges that hardly come to attention in the conservation community. Further, the Programs seem to have established an intellectual outlook on the scope of heritage resources and strategies to document them that have hardly been exposed. Lastly, the HDP discharge their responsibilities through playing a set of roles that are not sufficiently clear to many.

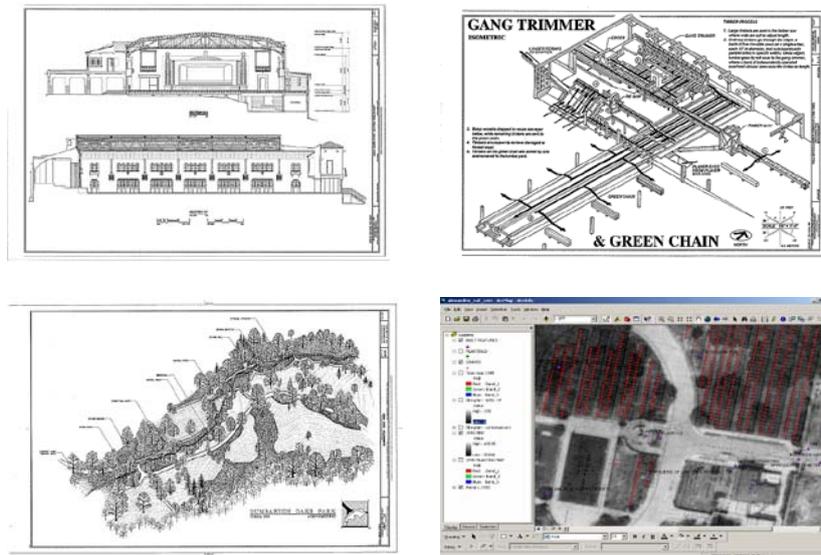


Figure 1: Upper left to bottom right: Examples of products of HABS, HAER, HALS, CRGIS (Source: NPS)

Disyphering unexplored attributes of HDP will reveal information that would round-up the Programs’ narrative in terms of history, character, performance, and by extension, potential impact. Therefore, this study has set out to: a) trace the Programs’ evolution and development beginning with HABS leading the way followed by other programs; b) examine the Programs’ outlook and strategies for defining the scope of work; and, c) explain the Programs’ relationship with the federal mandate and the roles for discharging responsibilities.

Among other sources, the paper has drawn heavily on the extensive literature covering the HDP and the federal conservation programs in general emanating from within the National Park Service. The NPS information includes a great deal of original source printed materials that have been digitally appropriated for web dissemination, hence the noticeable appearance of NPS web references. The collected data was synthesized employing narrative, comparative, enumerative, and other idea exposition strategies to coherently convey intent. The NPS graphic and photographic illustrations used in this paper are in the public domain, and have been used in such vein. The terms conservation and preservation are used interchangeably in this paper to convey the same meaning for the wholistic care of heritage resources.

This paper has added fresh information that helps round-up our understanding of the HDP. The paper concluded that a) the country’s amenable disposition for nurturing a conservation movement played a role in developing what became as Heritage Documentation Programs; however, the organizational framework of the Programs within the National Park Service has had an uneven history; b) the emergence of the Programs indicates a renewed need for attending to distinct segments of heritage resources, thus echoing a holistic outlook on heritage and its conservation; however, this liberal outlook posed a challenge for sorting out and reducing the resources to a manageable sum; and c) HDP carry out the federal mandate through a number of roles that transcend the technical performance of documentation to the educational, cultural, and curatorial purposes.

2. A DOCUMENTATION SCENE

2.1 HABS Leading the Way

The Historic American Buildings Survey was born out of circumstance. The economic slump of the early 1930s and the verve of a young architect by the name of Charles Paterson played a role in bringing HABS to life. Proposed by Paterson and seen of benefit to employing young architects at the time, the Secretary of the Interior and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration approved the program in November 1933 for a six-month period; the program operated under the Branch of Plans and Design in the NPS. When funding ended in May 1934, sparking trying times for the infant program, the NPS, American Institute of Architects (AIA), and Library of Congress (LC) signed a memorandum of agreement on July 23, 1934 setting out partnership responsibilities to sustain the program. Figure 2 depicts HABS partnership model, which was later applied to HAER and HALS creation partnerships. Recognized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, HABS Program's stability was corroborated by funding as a result of the Department of the Interior Appropriation Act the year after. HABS lost federal funding in 1941. Surviving through support of some organizations, the Program bounced back in 1957 as a unit under the NPS Branch of Architecture, Division of Design and Construction.

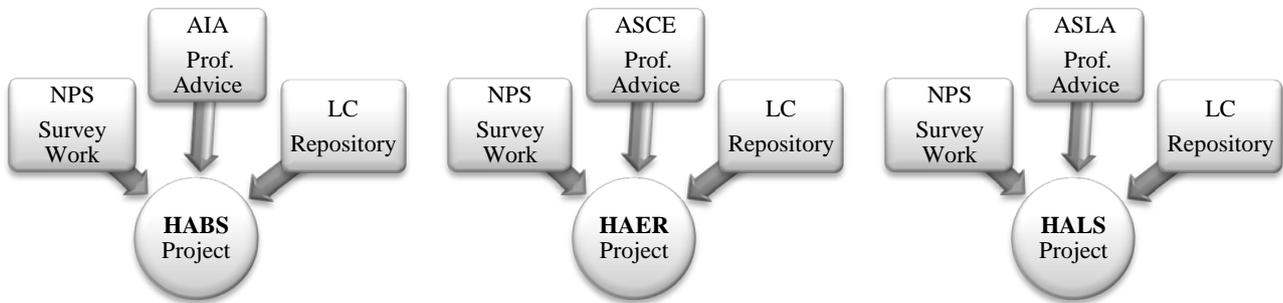


Figure 2: Similar partnership models for HABS (left), HAER, and HALS

HABS changed hands several times in the federal hierarchy. A summary of the organization's administrative affiliations follows:

- Moved between units in the National Park Service
- Moved between Services in the Department of the Interior: from the NPS to Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (1978-81)
- Maintained close or separated relationship with other documentation programs: Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) early on, and Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) and Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems (CRGIS) afterwards.

2.2 Parallel Programs

A repercussion of HABS activity was the birth in 1969 of the Historic American Engineering Record, HAER. HABS had been all along documenting some engineering structures although, and understandably, to a much lesser extent than subjects of architectural nature. HABS experience seems to have focused attention on the need for recording activities dedicated for the vast engineering and industrial sites dotting the American landscape. As a result, the National Park Service, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), and the Library of Congress came to an agreement on setting up an engineering documentation organization (Figure 2) which “was later ratified by four other engineering societies: the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers”[3].

Similar to HABS, HAER changed affiliations in the federal hierarchy. Its relationship, in particular with HABS, fluctuated as follows:

- Consolidated in 1973 with HABS to form the new separate Division of Historic and Architectural Surveys in the NPS.

- Separated in 1976 from HABS to become independent HAER Division in NPS; HABS became also an independent division.
- Consolidated in 1978 again with HABS under the new National Architectural and Engineering Record Division (NAER), in the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS)
- Re-designated in 1982 as HABS/HAER Division in the National Park Service
- HAER is now a separate program in the NPS

HABS and HAER documentation successes in the midst of nationally growing appreciation of the natural and outdoor heritage have instigated the emergence of a peer documentation program, the Historic American Landscape Survey, HALS. HALS permanent establishment in 2000 followed its predecessors’ partnership model where, in this case, the American Society of Landscape Architects provides professional advice while the National Park Service administers the program and executes surveys and the Library of Congress keeps documentation records and makes them available to the public (Figure 2). HALS program aims at providing permanent record of landscape patterns and development that reflects the diverse national culture through time [4]. Capitalizing on HABS and HAER experiences, HALS adheres to the basic methods of documentation including measured drawings, photographs, and written data, but still accommodate “nuances that distinguish landscapes from buildings and other structures”[5].

While HABS, HAER, and HALS births emanated largely from renewed recognition of different forms of the heritage built environment, a forth program emerged from the need to capture the potential of the incessantly improving information acquisition and management technologies. The Cultural Resources Geographic Information System, CRGIS, aims at institutionalizing "the use of GIS, Global Positioning Systems (GPS), and Remote Sensing technologies in historic preservation..."[6].

3. PROGRAMS AT WORK

3.1 Search For Consistency

The HABS and HAER decades of survey and documentation experiences led to crystallizing in 1983 a set of documentation standards under the name Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Architectural and Engineering Documentation. These standards and their associated guidelines address attributes of content, quality, material, and presentation involving measured drawings, photographs, and written data—the three cardinal forms of documentation (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The standards in the attributes of content, quality, material, and presentation across the three forms of documentation

The attributes are briefly defined below:

- Content: framed by what is significant about heritage resources
- Quality: accuracy and reliability of information
- Material: durability, reproducibility, and standardization of sizes
- Presentation: clarity and conciseness

Influenced by the ideological outlook of the National Historic Preservation Program entrusted to the National Park Service, these standards extend a mature response as to why document heritage resources in

the first place. The standards placed documentation rightfully in the context of preservation where resources significance and authenticity are forefront considerations. The standards for content and quality, in particular, are further explained below.

The Standards begin, no wonder, with making the resource significance a pivot of documentation activity and thus calibrate the breadth and depth of what to be documented—content—in service of preservation aims: “Documentation Shall Adequately Explicate and Illustrate What is Significant or Valuable About the Historic Building, Site, Structure or Object Being Documented”[7]. This “content” standard is fleshed out in a scheme of four documentation levels. A documentation level expresses the collective degree of documentation fullness conveyed in measured drawings, photographs, and written data. To illustrate, contents defined by Documentation Levels I and III are contrasted in Figure 4.

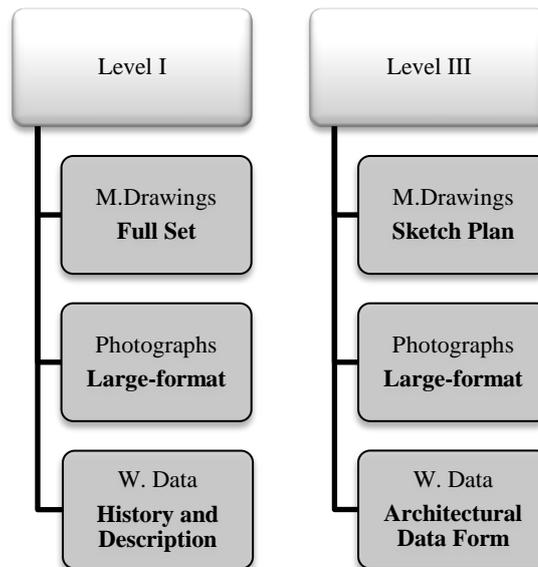


Figure 4: Contrasting Documentation Level I and III

The Standards scheme augments documentation through a requirement for quality assurance. The second Standard states that “Documentation Shall be Prepared Accurately from Reliable Sources with Limitations Clearly Stated to Permit Independent Verification of the Information”[7]. The requirement generally applies to all levels of documentation across measured drawings, photographs, and written data. However, the requirement endures quality variations for different levels of documentation. Figure 5 depicts such variations for measured drawings and for written data.

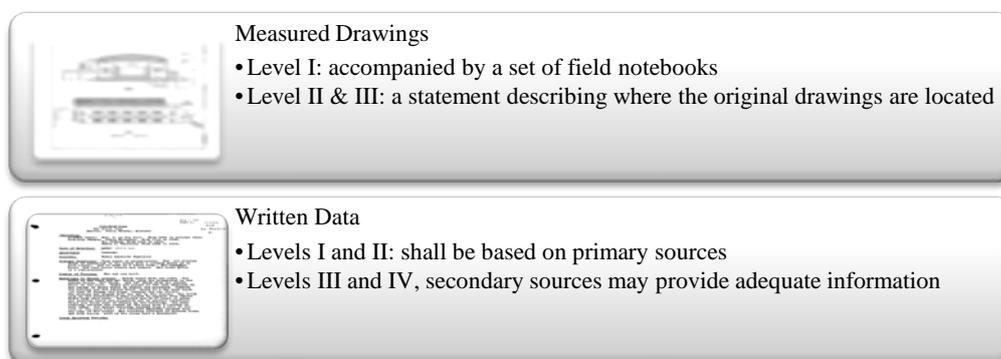


Figure 5: Quality variations in Measured Drawings and in Written Data

3.2 Sorting Out Resources

Broadly speaking, two primary measures guide the HDP in sorting out heritage resources for documentation and thus influencing the scope of work. The first springs from the notion that the built environment heritage is a whole entity; the second springs from the notion that documenting all available resources is untenable.

3.2.1 A Holistic Outlook

Serving the conservation field and influenced by the field's philosophical currents, documentation activity in the NPS reached out to one class of heritage resources after another, and in the process, built up a body of work corroborating the wholeness of the built environment heritage. In one sense, the question of what to document has been addressed on a grand level at important junctures of the life of NPS Heritage Documentation Programs.

Under the national awakening in the early decades of the twentieth century to the value of heritage building—as the dominant medium of the built environment in the public's psyche—the graphically spirited architects working with scarce financial resources had shaped the humble beginnings of the HDP in 1930s through improvised practices of architectural documentation. HABS, then the newly born and the destined leader program, called for “a complete resume of the builder's art”[8] with the expectation to include “ranges in type and style from the monumental and architect-designed to the utilitarian and vernacular, including a sampling of our nation's vast array of regionally and ethnically derived building traditions”[9]. HABS must have been busy trying to sort out the categories of buildings to bring to the documentation fold. Heritage resources of non-architectural nature were not at the core of HABS' mandate. Interestingly, but rather surprisingly, HABS records incorporate completed surveys for structures of engineering nature as well as for landscape spatial environments.

The establishment of HAER in 1969 accorded with the expansive nature of heritage resources and ushered to bringing into the documentation arena participations from a growing circle of disciplines and professionals. The sporadic surveys of engineering sites by HABS has now given way to focused activity by this emerging offshoot organization beginning with civil and military engineering resources. Surveys expanded subsequently to sites, structures, and machinery representing heritage associated with mechanical, electrical, chemical, mining, and other engineering fields. Documentation subjects encompassed “...individual sites or objects, such as a bridge, ship, or steel works; or larger systems, like railroads, canals, electronic generation and transmission networks, parkways and roads”[3].

The story of HALS creation in 2000 provided another telling juncture in the development of Heritage Documentation Programs that, among other things, marks the attention given to expanding types of resources deemed appropriate for research and survey. In correspondence with the conservation ethos of the day, documentation aspirations now unwaveringly embrace vernacular and designed landscapes. Distinguished at the core of their character from buildings and industrial complexes by elements of nature and open space, these landscape sites dotting buildup, suburban, and rural areas had stimulated methodical surveys of their own.

3.2.2 The Reduction Imperative

HDP do not exercise exhaustive documentation—covering of all possible heritage resources. By necessity, the massive magnitudes of potential resources of relevance to any and all programs are reduced to enable viable survey coverage. This practice is influenced primarily by the perceived heritage value, a permeating conservation doctrine that, in this case, underscores the role of documentation in the holistic conservation process. For example, HABS Guidelines for Historical Reports state that significance “presents the rationale for recording the building or site, emphasizing its significance in the local, regional, or national context” [10].

Resources candidates for HDP action are generally of the caliber germane to the properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Eligibility for listing properties on the National register is determined through applying the National Register Criteria for Evaluation:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in or past; or

- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory[11].

4. MANDATE AND CONTRIBUTIVE ROLES

What had begun a humble HABS initiative in 1933 grew into specialized documentation programs with distinctive impact on the conservation field. Seeking to satisfy the federal mandate, the work of the HDP continues to redefine documentation through a number of roles.

4.1 The Federal Mandate

Successive crystallizations in the federal documentation function and the discharge of duties of its four HDP organizational units are intended to fulfill a comprehensive and balanced documentation mission in association with the National Historic Preservation Program delegated to the National Park Service. If the successive creations of these units are in themselves any indication of reach and inclusion, the geographic, jurisdictional, and significance distributions of the resources in question are, in their turn, expressions of balance and equity. The HDP work touches all corners of the country, beginning with the widely distributed national parks and sites of federal projects that impact heritage resources. Further, documentation opportunities are open for jurisdictions at all scales including small towns, metropolitan areas, and the States. Heritage Documentation Programs' partnerships have been established with these jurisdictions to document resources of local, State, or national significance. The HDP work "captures the American experience through approximately 40,000 recorded historic structures and sites, from American Indian cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde to space-age technology at Cape Canaveral"[12].

The HDP products are disseminated through a premier national outlet, the Library of Congress. Many architectural, engineering, and landscape records can be accessed online or ordered in the normative formats of measured drawings, photographs, and written descriptive data.

4.2 Contributive Roles

HDP activity and products contribute to the conservation field through a number of roles:

- Treatment Supportive Role
 - Supporting restoration and maintenance activities of historic sites and structures in possession of the National Park Service
 - Supporting rehabilitation and preservation of public and private resources
- Resource Compensative Role

Targeting perished or perishable resources, this "preservation through documentation" effort signifies the value of having records for properties prior to their demise or for properties that are deemed endangered. Available records will be the only evidence that the resource had existed. Mitigation documentation is a conspicuous class of application for properties slated for removal.
- Knowledge Augmentative Role

Documentation infuses knowledge in the conservation community through education and research. College students, particularly in architecture and design fields, are routinely recruited for HDP summer project survey teams. Further, the HDP sponsor two national measured drawings competitions, one for the best set of HABS measured drawings completed by students and the second for a the best single-sheet measured drawing completed by students or professionals for an architectural, engineering, or landscape site. Further, the HDP partner with regional cultural resource programs to facilitate integration of university capabilities into documenting projects of interest. For example, through a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units involving collaborations with three universities, HABS documented pueblito sites in New Mexico and HALS documented Skyline Park in Denver[13]. In the end, the magnitude, range, and accessibility of HDP documentation records provide a mine of primary information materials for researchers interested in survey and documentation, conservation, and heritage in general.
- Diversity Responsive Role

The Heritage Documentation Programs uphold diversity as a unit within the National Park Service, the federal conglomerate agency. The National Park System espouses cultural diversity “by commemorating American Indians, Pacific Islanders, Alaska Natives, African Americans, Spanish pioneers, and European and Asian immigrants who were integral to the development of our country”[14]. The System is meant “to preserve and tell the legacy of individuals, historical, natural and cultural places/events that are worthy of the concern and attention of our generation and future generations. They represent the grand diversity that is America”[14].

HDP document resources that tend to represent the culturally diverse populations of the United States. Further, the Programs bring attention to a peak on special celebratory occasions such as the Presidential diversity heritage month proclamations. In the context of the proclaimed Jewish, Hispanic, and African American heritage months, HDP seek to increase the public’s understanding of the historical accomplishments and contribution of these constituent groups by highlighting pertinent architectural, engineering, and landscape sites.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are made on the three parts of the paper discussion.

5.1 Regarding the Documentation Scene

- Although the creation of Historic American Building Survey in 1933 appears to have been by coincidence, the country’s amenable disposition for embarking on a conservation movement played a role in developing what became known Heritage Documentation Programs.
- The growing national appreciation of material culture supported by federal preservation legislations and plans laid out the conditions for turning the one-time HABS creation into a pattern of documentation program initiatives. Building on HABS experience, HAER, HALS, and CRGIS came to the scene.
- The organizational framework of the programs within the National Park Service has had an uneven history and so had the unilateral relationships involving individual programs. As the lone program for over a score of years, HABS changed hands several time among the NPS units. HABS and its companion program HAER were set in parallel under the same division at one time, to consolidate during a subsequent period under a division of their own. HALS and CRGIS, as more recent programs, have witnessed less of a rocky organizational environment.

5.2 Regarding Programs at Work

The very development of the HDP, one program at a time with intervening years, reflects to a great degree the development of the preservation movement in the country. The periodic emergence of HABS, HAER, and HALS indicates the need for attending to distinct segments of heritage resources, thus echoing a holistic outlook at heritage and its conservation. However, this liberal outlook posed a challenge for sorting out the resources that are eligible for documentation. As documenting all available resources is untenable, HDP subscribe to heritage significance doctrine as a primary criterion for reducing the vast amount of resources into a manageable size.

5.3 Regarding Mandate and Contributive Roles

As part of the National Historic Preservation Program delegated to the National Park Service, HDP carries out the federal mandate through a number of roles that transcend the technical performance of documentation to the educational, cultural, and curatorial purposes. The determination of resource types, locations, and significance for documentation is rooted in principles of inclusion and equity.

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