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LOS ANGELES CORRAL

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Percy Locke Bonebrake 1878 - 1957



PERCY L. BONEBRAKE

One of the last photographs of Los Angeles Corral's beloved Oldtimer, taken at a Westerner's dinner meeting, Costa's Grill.

-Lonnie Hull Photo.

AN APPRECIATION

By LEE SHIPPEY

TE WESTERNERS, who knew him best, can never forget Percy Bonebrake, and can never think of him without an affectionate smile. His humorous acts and comments have become traditional, yet they never hurt anyone. We shall miss the continual laughs he gave us and we shall miss the warm, reliable friendship on which we could always count. I doubt that any of us who knew him best can ever attend a meeting of the Westerners without missing him.

He was far more than a delightful and lovable personality, though. He was an authentic link with the youth of Los Angeles as an American city. When he was born in Los Angeles the latest estimate had given the "Queen of the Cow Counties" only about 10,000 residents. His father was a leading banker and wished Percy to succeed him. But Percy was too much in love with the West as it was then to be jailed behind a banker's desk. He left home in youth to adventure as cowboy, cattle buyer, peace officer, prospector, and finally as right-hand man for Lucky Baldwin.

Besides belonging to one of the outstanding families of American Los Angeles, Percy's late wife descended from Governor Arguello, founder of one of the greatest families of Spanish days. So Percy was blood-brother to much that was best in California and was himself a living page of history—one of the few who not only lived through the astounding changes which have taken place here, but took active part in the things which made California what it is.

We shall always honor Percy Bonebrake for what we did. But we shall always love him for what he was.

THE BRANDING IRON

OF THE LOS ANGELES CORRAL OF THE WESTERNERS

* * *

Published Quarterly in March, June, September, December

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Address Material for Publication to The Roundup Foreman PAUL BAILEY

P. O. Box 41073, Los Angeles 41, California

Fine Meetings Continue

The quality of meetings of Los Angeles Corral continues to be maintained, and this is indicated in the near-record attendance at most of the sessions of the past few months. Satisfaction seems to be general in regard to food and hospitality at Costa's Grill, and because of these favorable factors, the organization appears energetic and very much alive.

Speaker for our March meeting was ex-Sheriff Carl S. Dentzel, who chose as his subject "Indians and the Pioneer Frontier; the Westward Tradition in 19th Century American Art." In the incomparably finished manner in which Carl is capable, the members and guests assembled were treated to a new interpretation and understanding of the artist on the wilderness borders of America, and the tremendous part he had in bringing visual understanding of the untamed west to the future generations of a great nation. Distinguished visitors at this meeting, held on the eve of the Southwest Conference at Occi-

dental College, were very much in evidence. Among the many present were Dr. Thomas Donnelly, president of New Mexico Highlands University; Drs. Raymond Lindgren and Andrew Rolle, of Occidental College; Paul Oppermann, city planner; Dr. Herbert Evans, Dick Moore, Bob Mayers, Thomas DeGraffin, Kenneth Hamilton, Don Galleher, and many more. At this meeting Editor W. W. Robinson gave his report on the progress and contents of the Seventh Brand Book—fully announced in this issue of the BI.

April's meeting brought us Westerner Phil Rasch, our own expert on the bloody affairs of Lincoln County and New Mexico in general. His talk, "The Rise of the House of Murphy," gave us additional sidelights on that turbulent area, and confirmed everyone's belief that Phil Rasch is truly the nation's topmost authority on the subject. His research was meticulous, and his paper extremely interesting. It will be a great enhancement to next year's Brand Book. This meeting, too, was well attended, with many visitors and guests.

Moving our meeting date forward a day to accommodate our speaker's schedule affected none the attendance or interest at the May meeting. Dr. Allan Nevins, distinguished author, holder of ten honorary doctorates, and the biographer of Fremont among others, was the speaker. His topic, "The Services and Errors of Fremont," was a scholarly dissertation on this most controversial character in western history. New facts were given to us, and the facility and brilliance of the speaker made it an evening long to be remembered. And who can forget our own Percy Bonebrake, who added his own reminiscences of Fremont at the close of this remarkable talk? Percy told us about having sat in Gen. Fremont's own parlor, of having known and talked to Jessie Benton Fremont, of his remembrance of the white-haired man of destiny, of his own convictions as to time's interpretation of the man. Our beloved Oldtimer will never again grace a Westerner meeting with his lovable humor, his remembrance of a pioneer past, and his barbed sallies aimed at keeping the record straight. The words he uttered that night, out of his rich remembered past, must forever be his final requiem to Los Angeles Corral. Vaya con Dios, Percy. We shall never forget you.

At this same meeting Dr. Harvey Johnson was voted into full membership in Los Angeles Corral of Westerners. He was warmly welcomed by the Westerners present.

Westerners Write Their Sorrow At Percy's Passing

ED CARTER

from Burlingame, California

Your letter telling of Percy's death brought us as much of a shock as though he was one of our own family. His last letter to us is dated May 25 and I have been intending for the past two weeks to answer it. We are terribly, terribly sorry to have him go and we can only pray that he and Cricket are together again. Henrietta and I were so very sorry to say goodbye to the dear old fellow when we left South Pasadena and I shall never forget the more than affectionate bear-hug he gave me at our parting. Tears were in his eyes and in mine. We both knew the West when it was real and raw and we could talk the language of those days, not learned from modern books on "How To," but from our own personal experiences from boyhood, on. We know how greatly he will be missed, not only by his daughter and Bud but by all of the Westerners and by his friends everywhere. There was always a warmth and affection about his seeming rugged old person that warmed a fellow's heart and gave assurance that he was a true friend. We miss our almost daily telephone chats with him.

That Henrietta and I have ever found him so is written in the ten letters we have received from him since we have been up here. They were all characteristic of Percy. They were always captioned: Circled B Hawg Wrench,

Skunk Forks Koon Krick, Kaliforny

and they were just apt to be dated "Today" or "Yesterday" as giving the day and month. Following are some samples of his letters: That of January 2, '56, winds up: "I am running out of paper and it is too cold to go to my desk for another sheet. Besides who in the hell do you think you are, that I got to do that?" In a post-script to that letter he says: "Please fumigate your letters after this; the mail carrier asks me some quite embarrassing questions."

In another letter, referring to my health, he tells Henrietta he is worried about me and wonders if, without his influence I have gone to the wild bunch, "and took to watering at night." He hopes Ed has not fallen off the bar stools again, "it is safer to drink in one of those booths,

and it is more high-toned."

In our "chats," which I miss as much as he did, he was always concerned about my annual bath; whether or not I had thrown away the socks I had been wearing for the past year, and had I washed my feet? Ever since Gregg Layne announced that my father introduced the first sheep into Wyoming, Percy was very much concerned about my "sheep smell."

Percy often spoke of the trouble with his

ART WOODWARD

from Tucson, Arizona

Percy Bonebrake was always too much of a man to want to slough off life, even when he had lost the main interest in living. I have never known a man so generous and hospitable, so kindly and charitable, even to his enemies, and among the living they were almost non-existent. To me Percy will always remain the epitome of the 1890's. He was the tag end of the west, the connecting link between the range riders of the 70s and the '80s and he had a vivid sense of history that few of his kind had. I am all fired glad that the Westerners supplied the tape and the recording machine to enable him to talk out some of his experiences. I am also glad that I have on my wire recorder some of his yarns. In May, shortly before his 79th birthday, which was on the 18th of May, he made his last trip into the Warner's Ranch country where he spent the year 1879-1898 and again in 1909-1910. He wrote me May 8 shortly after the trip, saying, "Except for Teofilo Helm and his sister, Sam Taylor's widow, I do not know of one person (except those that were small children) being alive now. It made me feel rather sad. I overdid, as I always do, when I go any place, and am awfully tired."

For two or three years Percy had been hankering to revisit the scenes of his youth in Arizona and California. Well, at least he realized part of his dream, even if it did do him in.

I hope the Westerners turned out in goodly number to see him off wherever he is headed. I only wish that I could have been there but it was too late. Wherever he is I'll bet he's either sassing the devil or speaking polite to Jesus. I like to think of the old hoss thief getting into the saddle again as he did when he was a boy and riding hell bent along the forgotten mountain trails in New Mexico or Arizona, whooping after his dogs on the trail of a big cat, with Cricket pounding along behind him.

heart—down one day and so well another that, when he wrote last September that he was troubled again with his heart condition, his kidney, stomach and hernia, I was not too much concerned, even though, in that letter, he wrote: "So you can understand why I am down in the dumps most of the time. You folks are so far away I cannot enjoy those nice chats we used to have over the phone; you might as well be in Siberia."

In one letter he wrote: "I liked Art Clark's wife very much indeed but, like Henrietta, her taste in men is deplorable. I guess they both realize now that marriage truly is a lottery and somebody has to get stuck."

TN THE year 1855 Thomas Mason and his wife Mary, with a small group of pioneers, settled in the beautiful Keechi Valley a few miles south of Fort Richardson, which was located near the city of Jacksboro, Texas. Equipped with ax, cross-cut saw, broad-ax, foot adz and fro, they went into the forest and brought out all the materials necessary for building sturdy log houses. These homes, one of which is still standing, included port holes and served as a temporary fort in defense against Indian attacks. Arms and ammunition were always kept close at hand in and out of doors. The settlers were always alert and usually discovered Indian Sign in time to alert the fort by the use of various signals before the attack. Sometimes they used the Indian Signal-the smoke and blanket. In this particular settlement there was a small bare hill with two scrubby oaks on top, called "Two Bush Knob," from which signals were sent and could be seen by all members of the settlement. Occasionally the wiley foe succeeded in making a surprise attack. Some of the pioneers would become negligent and unprepared. The wise pioneer always kept his powder dry, a supply of bullets moulded, and his spare water barrel filled.

Tom and Mary Mason built their home on the western edge of the settlement, near a cool bubbling spring. As time went by their home was blessed with two little boys, Tobias the eldest and Cleaveland the younger. Tobe and Cleve, they were called.

The Masons, as were most of the pioneers, were fortified with courage and determination to defend their right to possess the land and dwell therein in peace and happiness. They brought few possessions with them; their wants being meager. They were of a hardy race and the land furnished most of their necessities. Game was plentiful: In the mountains nearby deer, bear and wild turkeys were to be had; in the valley, the prairie chickens and plovers were in abundance; in the fall migratory fowls came to this settlement by the millions—the wild geese, robins and wild pigeons. Their stock thrived on the nutritious grasses of the valley; the climate was moderate. It was a good land. There was only one thing lacking-peace. Without peace, happiness cannot be complete.

In the year 1858 tragedy came to the home of Tom and Mary Mason. At early dawn on the morning of April 8, a flash signal came from "Two Bush Knob," to the effect that a large band of Indians were approaching from the East with many horses—and they were traveling fast. Apparently the Indians were being followed by a posse of citizens from another settlement. Later the Masons were advised that the Indians were passing south of the Keechi Settlement. All able-bodied men of the settlement were in pursuit. They did not know that a small band of the Indians were headed toward the settlement. Only the men who were unable to go with the posse were left to defend their families against these Indians who had branched off from the main body of attackers. The posse overtook the larger group of Indians and recovered the stolen horses, but most of the Indians escaped.

Three days later Pete Lynn (a noted Indian fighter and a brother of Mary Mason) came by the Mason Home on his return from the chase and beheld a sight that would make an old Indian fighter's blood boil. The bodies of Tom and Mary—filled with arrows—were lying near the house. Little Cleve, less than a year old, was crawling about the still body of his mother. Tobe, who was a little more than two years of age, was in the house asleep. Evidently Mary had just finished churning when the Indians struck. This churn of buttermilk was all that had kept the children alive. Tobe said that he drank some of the buttermilk and had given some to his little brother.

Tom and Mary Mason were buried by relatives and neighbors near their home. We don't know just how the bodies were prepared for burial, though we do know that it was impossible to obtain a casket. They were buried in an open grave with their wagon box turned upside down over them, and their resting place marked by a large sandstone. In 1936, The Kutch-Manning Associates—an organization which located and marked historical graves and other places of interest—erected a suitable monument on the spot.

In 1955 a survey for a Home-to-Market Highway was made by the Texas Highway Depart-



GRAVE OF TOM MASON AND WIFE Relocated alongside new highway which cuts across the original site, Keechi Valley, Texas, near the town of Fort Richardson.

ment which ran across this grave. For this reason, the County Commissioner's Court ordered the bodies exhumed and the gravesite moved approximately twenty feet, but adjacent to the new highway right-of-way. The Honorable John R. Lindsey, County Judge of Jack County of Texas, states that the funeral director reported the bodies as remarkably well preserved.

After a hundred years Tom and Mary Mason were placed in a beautiful casket and put in a new grave. At last, the CAUSE, for which they heroically lived and died, has become an accomplished fact—The Pale Face and the Red Man are no longer enemies, but are now working hand in hand that all peoples all over the Earth may live together as the Creator intended—IN PEACE.

Author's note. Cleve Mason became famous for his ability to catch wild mustangs. He was the first American to walk them down on foot.

I am indebted to the following persons for assisting me in accumulating data for this story:

Hon. J. R. Lindsey—County Judge, Jacksboro, Texas George Harrison, Jacksboro Texas

P. S. Lynn, Oran, Texas

J. W. Dodson, Perrin, Texas

From the Mailbag . . .

The last issue (March) of *The Trail Guide*, publication of the Kansas City Posse of Westerners, is an elaborate 16-page booklet given over in its entirety to "Marcus Whitman, Physician, Pioneer, Missionary, Empire Builder," by Mahlon Delp, M.D. This splendid monograph on the pioneer of Old Oregon should be on the bookshelf of every Westerner. It is scholarly written, well documentated, and complete with notes and bibliography. Kansas City Westerners should be proud of their splendidly gotten together *Trail Guides*, and the meaty and always interesting material so consistently a part of their publication.

An important and valuable part of the Whitman article is an inclusion of the complete list of occupants of the mission at the time of the massacre, with the listed names totaling 74.

The two latest additions to the fine series of local California histories being written by Westerner W. W. Robinson are The Story of San Luis Obispo County, and The Story of Riverside County. They are being published as a project by Title Insurance and Trust Company, are beautifully printed, and replete with good illustrations of high historical value. And since Will did the writing, their quality of authorship could never be anything but excellent.

PERCY'S LAST BIRTHDAY INTERVIEW

In the May 24 issue of the PASADENA INDE-PENDENT, under heading of "Old Time Marshal Says Wild West Not Quite Like Movies," an illustrated feature story about Percy Bonebrake was published under the by-line of Ray Duncan. The interview was so typical of our Corral's Oldtimer that we set it up in type for the Branding Iron. Before going to press, news came of Percy's sudden death. It was decided since it was Percy's last interview, and so characteristic of him, to publish it regardless. Said Duncan in honor of Percy's 79th birthday:

Two bridles hang on the living room wall in the house where Percy Bonebrake lives, and a saddle blanket is a rug on the floor, but he doesn't believe in the Wild West you believe in.

"Did I ever kill anyone?" he echoes to each visitor in his little cottage at 180 Santa Anita Court in Sierra Madre. "No sir, God be thanked, and I don't intend to.

Ever carry a gun?

"Since I was a little boy."

Carry one now? "Only at night."

Bonebrake, a former U. S. deputy marshal and special agent for the Treasury Department, a former railroad detective and in between times a cowman all his life, is celebrating his 79th birthday. He has been celebrating it for the past few days, with parties and family gatherings, and he's not through yet.

"I've written some things about the old West, and I've talked a lot of tape recordings for the County Museum. I'm putting 21 hours of talk on tape now for the Westerners-that's a club of people interested in authentic Western his-

tory. Not fiction.

'Killers? Bad men? There were a few, of course, but they weren't the real West. Why, people commit crimes every day now that we

never even heard of in those days."

"Two-gun men? I never knew a good gunfighter that carried two guns on his belt. He might have one belt gun and another one hidden on him somewhere, just in case.

"I never saw a good gunfighter wear a slanted gun belt, or one that dropped down low. He'd want his gun belt tight and high, so his gun would always be where he could find it easy as he could find his own nose."

"Very few cowmen were much good at handling a rope," he says. "Most of them weren't even allowed to rope their own horses when they started work of a morning. The foreman would have a good roper go out and get all the horses

Bonebrake was a peace officer in Cheyenne and in Arizona and California. Ask him if he's ever been shot at in anger and he'll back away.

"Whenever a man starts talking about his gun scrapes and the people he's killed, look for a liar," he says.

He wears a checkered shirt under a business suit, and he walks erect, alert, sure in his movements—in cowboy boots. His tie clasp is a little golden pistol.

Bonebrake once invented a holster that was part of his suspenders and helped hold his trousers up. Always a cautious man, even today he

wears both belt and suspenders.

"As far as gunfighters go," he says, "you take the average policeman patrolling your streets today, and set him back in a cow-town street 70 years ago and he'll outshoot the best killer in

"He's better trained and he's got a better gun with better cartridges. A lot of my friends would

cringe to hear me say that."

Bonebrake has white hair and a white moustache, and his voice is gentle, thin and soothing.

His heroes are not on TV today.

"I've known peace officers that were dead game and doing a job, and others that just enjoyed killing people. Wyatt Earp was a quiet man, soft-spoken and polite, but the finest sheriff ever produced was John B. Slaughter. He cleaned up Tombstone after the Earps left. I knew Hugh McGrath. But Hollywood doesn't.

"Narrow scrapes?" says Bonebrake. "I've been scared a lot of times, but not at what you'd think. You want to know a dangerous job? Riding a train loaded with cattle. You get a cow down in one of the cars and you've got to go in there and get her up or she'll die. I never did like going into a car jammed with scared cattle. Almost fell off a moving cattle train once. Hung there by my finger-tips for miles. Most scared I've ever been in my life.

"One time I was riding to serve a legal paper on a man and my horse fell on me, pinned me down so I could hardly move. Bent the stirrup so I couldn't get my foot out. I was afraid the horse would get up and start running scared and drag me. Mavbe drag me all night through the brush.

"I got hold of his mane and tried to hold his head down. You hold a horse's head down and he can't get up. A horse gets up front feet first, and a cow gets up hind feet first. We laid there for hours fighting each other, both of us scared to death.

"Finally I twisted around so I could get the reins, and I tied his head back to the saddle horn. Then I worked my hand under and loosened the saddle, so when the horse got up he'd leave me and the saddle on the ground—which he did.

"Wild West? I'm almost scared to go out on

the streets in a city now at night."

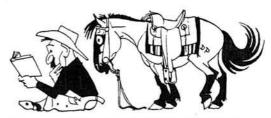
L.A. Corral of Westerners Welcomes New Members

Three new regular members have been added to the rolls of Los Angeles Corral, to fill vacancies in its 50-member roster occasioned by death or dropping out of former members. That a careful screening of candidates, as to background and interests, is taking place, can be attested by the high quality of these new Westerners, who were unanimously voted into full membership by the Corral assembled in open meeting during the past three months. The Corral welcomes them into its ranks.

DUDLEY C. GORDON, who was born July 18, 1897, in that far-western border town of Brooklyn, New York, is professor of English at Los Angeles City College. He was educated at Hobart College, Harvard and Columbia, and has done graduate work at University of California, U.C.L.A., U.S.C. and Claremont. He is author of Cultural Assets of Los Angeles, of numerous magazine and periodical articles. Some current ones are: "Researcher's Bonanza," in the Quarterly of the Historical Society of Southern California, and "Lummis and Mayne Reid," in the New Mexico Magazine. His greatest literary project, upon which he is presently industriously engaged, is a comprehensive biography of the great Charles Lummis. Hobbies are: Anything pertaining to the historical west, books, and the raising of avocados.

WEBSTER A. JONES is a fourth generation Oregonian. His great grandfather reached the Dalles in 1847, with a wife and nine boys, and this pioneer family settled into a pattern of ranchers, cattlemen, and horse-breeders. Webster's father ran one of the three saloons in Westfall, Oregon, and much of his babyhood was spent in the saloon. Webster swears that in his earliest years they parked his baby buggy alongside the bar, and that he cut his teeth on poker chips. He graduated from the University of Oregon in 1922, with a major in journalism. He has been a reporter, feature writer and editor on the Portland Oregonian, was with Sunset Magazine until 1947, when he left to become editor of Western Family Magazine. He now lives at Encino with his wife and two sons, and is currently engaged in writing a bibliography of historical books on Oregon.

HARVEY S. JOHNSON, M.D. is not only the third accepted candidate but is also the third medical man to enter our Corral gate. He grew up on a large cattle ranch on the plains of northwest Texas, in a period which marked the beginning of the end for the great cattle ranches of the west. And as a child he became so steeped with the lore of the west, that this interest has never waned. During his long medical education in Chicago, he lived with an uncle who had spent his entire lifetime doing research on historical subjects pertaining to the American west. This association rubbed off so solidly on Harvey that he came west, and has never ceased to peek an inquisitive nose into every noted or rumored ghost town in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada and California. From 1934-1936, while serving as surgeon for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power during the period they were building Crowley Dam, Grant Lake Dam and drilling the tunnel through the Mono craters, Harvey was stationed at the camp near Mono Lake. During that sojourn he sought out every oldtimer and talkative Indian he could find, and came up with much interesting material covering frontier and Indian medicine, and enough facts to write a book about the nearby ghost towns of Bodie and Aurora.



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL . . .

B. W. Allred and J. C. Dykes (edited by)— FLAT TOP RANCH, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman (1957), cloth 232 pp., illus., \$4.00.

FLAT TOP RANCH: The Story of a Grassland Venture is an amazing book. There have been ranch histories before but none like this. This is

the story of the creation of a ranch.

Charles Pettit bought the original Flat Top Ranch in Bosque County, Texas, in 1938, its seven thousand acres so badly overgrazed the previous lessee had moved off to keep his cattle from starving. To this nucleus, Pettit added another ten thousand acres by buying the adjoining farms which were in even worse condition; their top soil washed away, their fertility gone, the streams dried up, and their once-lush grasslands reduced to weeds or infested with brush.

The story of how these lands were restored to their former productivity makes fascinating reading. Most of the brush is gone and luxuriant stands of native grasses now clothe the hillsides. The streams are flowing again, fishing is good, and bob-white and deer add substantially to the annual income from the white-faced cattle. The details of how each of these tasks was accomplished is told by a number of outstanding conservationists and by the ranch staff. The late Louis Bromfield wrote the opening chapters and William R. Van Dersal tells the wildlife story. Westerners Bill Allred and Jeff Dykes edited the book and each contributed a chapter. This is a stimulating book for all present and prospective ranch owners and conservationists.

Fred Renner, Sheriff, Washington Westerners.

New Corresponding Members

The following new Corresponding Members have been added to the Roster. A hearty welcome to you, pardners.

Thomas P. Brown, Jr., 305 Oak St., San Marino, Calif. Robert F. Brown, 305 Oak St., San Marino, Calif. William B. Upton, 1718 State St., So. Pasadena, Calif. George B. Eckhart, P.O. Box 5315, Tucson, Arizona. Mrs. Robert Helms, Ardencraig, Grants Pass, Oregon H. C. Skinner, 946 Keystone Ave., River Forest, Ill. Richard Mohr, 7514 W.90th St. Los Angeles 45, Calif. Oril Wunderlich, 435 Whiskey Hill Road, Woodside, California.

Clay Lockett, 25 W. Council, Tucson, Arizona. Charles T. Waller, 316 United Bldg., Salina, Kansas. John L. Osborn, 2928 Taylor St., Corvalis, Oregon.

Los Angeles Corral of Westerners Announce

The 7th Brand Book

This handsome volume will stand as a highlight in the Los Angeles Corral's record of distinguished publishing. More than 270 pages; lavishly illustrated; magnificently printed and bound; it is a book for historian, collector, librarian—and a literary production to gladden the heart of any true Westerner.

Its colorful jacket is the creation of artist Don Perceval; typography and lithography are by Homer H. Boelter; it is edited by W. W. Robinson, with the assistance of James Algar and Paul Bailey. Included in it are such extra features as the hitherto unpublished sketches of Charles Russell, the cream of the Honeyman collection of early California prints and lithographs, a monograph history of all Westerner Corrals and Posses, by J. E. Reynolds, and an unsurpassed array of historical papers and articles by distinguished writers in and out of L. A. Corral.

No librarian, collector, historian or Westerner will want to be without THE SEVENTH BRAND BOOK. Orders are already pouring in. With only 475 copies available, this is bound to be a sellout. Avoid disappointment. Reserve your copy today!

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