

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## NORTON

Report Date: 1981

Associated Regional Report: Southeast Massachusetts

**Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports**, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

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## MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: September 1981

Community: Norton

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Norton is located in the Narragansett Basin 28 miles southwest of Boston and 18 miles from Providence, Rhode Island. The terrain of the town is generally level with a gentle slope south. Soils are generally sandy in the eastern portion of the town with some clay deposits on the Rumford River, and some coal deposits have been found in the northern portion of town although not of a quality or quantity for mining. Drainage via the Rumford and Wading River in the western portion of town. Winneconnet Pond, which is the only natural pond in the town, is fed by the Canoe River and Mulberry Meadow Brook. Taunton's Mill River rises from Winneconnet Pond.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Norton, the north precinct of Taunton, was established as a town on June 12, 1711 (o.s.). Part ceded to create Easton 1725. Annexed part of Stoughton 1753. Part established as the district of Mansfield 1770.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Norton is an historic industrial community. Little evidence of Contact period native settlement. Plantation period European settlement based on subsistence agriculture. Colonial period development of iron industry provided focus for settlement. Late 18th, early 19th century industrial sites at Chartley, Barrowsville and Copperworks Village provide nuclei for small scale residential settlement. Some industrialization at the center as well. Despite widespread industrial sites the majority of the population during the 19th century was engaged in farming. 19th century settlement pattern was linear. Wheaton College, founded in 1835 as the Wheaton Female Seminary provides educational node at Norton Center. Town held meetings at Congregational Church until 1843 when the first town hall was built. Copperworks Village known as Norton Furnace by the turn of the century. Bypassing of Norton Center by Taunton Branch of Boston and Providence Railroad due to intervention of Judge Wheaton who feared for property values. Norton Reservoir dammed 1868. Throughout the 19th and early 20th century Norton remained essentially a pastoral community; with construction of I-24 and the continuing construction of I-495 the town has attracted some small industrialization and quite a bit of suburban development.

### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

The Massachusetts Bay Path, a major native trail, passed through the northeastern corner of Norton following present Bay Street. This route provided access to the freshwater pond complex of Winneconnet Pond, Watson

Pond and Lake Sabattia. Main Street, a route which is adjacent to one site with a Middle-Late Woodland component and several unidentified native sites, is a potential secondary native trail.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported native Contact Period sites. Potentially, the greatest area of native Contact Period settlement occurred along the Canoe River and the Winnecunnet Pond area. Two sites with Middle-Late Woodland Period components and several unidentified native sites were situated near the river between Newcomb and Main Streets. Two large and several smaller unidentified native sites were clustered about Winnecunnet Pond, an area reputedly utilized by the Pokanokets prior to King Philip's War. Two small campsites with Middle Woodland and Early-Late Woodland components, respectively, were located immediately east of the junction of Pine and Hill Streets.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Freshwater fishing was possible in the numerous streams, rivers and the earlier mentioned freshwater pond complex. There was ready access to anadromous fish runs on the Three Mile, Mill and Taunton Rivers (Norton and Taunton). Considerable agricultural land was available throughout Norton. Hunting and gathering was likely in the area's widespread marsh and wooded lowlands.

D. Observations:

The Norton area was capable of sustaining a moderate native population. The Canoe River and Winnecunnet Pond were probably the focal point of native settlement. Norton's access to Narragansett Bay and its utilization by Philip during the 17th century suggests the natives were closely affiliated with the Pokanokets centered in Mount Hope (Bristol, Rhode Island). Several detailed archaeological reports (1977-81) dealing with native occupation in Norton are available at the MHC and Brown University Public Archaeology Lab.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails were utilized as part of the settlers' transportation network. The Massachusetts Bay Path (Bay Street) provided the first Norton settlers at Winnecunnet Pond access to the more heavily settled southern portion of Old Taunton (Taunton).

B. Population:

No documentation of native or white population figures. The white population probably numbered no more than a handful of families.

C. Settlement Patterns:

There was little data available concerning the native settlement patterns. It is doubtful these patterns were markedly different from those of the Contact

Period, largely because of the small degree of white settlement. The only documented native site was "Philip's Cave" situated on Great Rocky Hill north of Winnecunnet Pond. Reputedly, this cave was utilized by King Philip for shelter when fishing and hunting in the vicinity of the pond.

The first white settlement did not take place until c. 1669 when William Witherell established a home on the eastern shore of Winnecunnet Pond south of Toad Island Road. Several other families followed, settling in the vicinity of the pond, probably attracted by the area's potential agricultural land and freshwater. A graveyard near the Witherell home site may contain the graves of these early settlers. This hamlet lacked civic and religious facilities relying on those of present Taunton. There is no evidence of additional pre-1675 white settlement.

D. Economic Base:

No documentation of the native economy. The native population probably retained their traditional subsistence patterns due to the limited impact white settlement would have had on these rounds.

The white community focused primarily on subsistence agriculture, fishing and hunting along the freshwater streams, rivers, ponds and marshy and wooded lowlands. Industrial facilities were absent and probably sought in present Taunton. Anglo-Indian trade quite likely occurred between the Winnecunnet Pond settlers and area natives.

E. Observations:

The limited data suggest the Norton area lacked a substantial, permanent native population. It functioned primarily as seasonal fishing and hunting territory for the Pokanokets of Narragansett Bay. Additional research, however, is needed to clarify native settlement during this period. The white settlement was situated on the frontier fringe of Old Taunton. Due to the limited development in proximity of Winnecunnet Pond (confined almost exclusively to the pond's immediate shore), there is a good likelihood of surviving archaeological remains of the Winnecunnet Pond settlement.

IV. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675 - 1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

By the late 17th century, several north-south routes provided the newly established town center (Main Street - Wheaton College) with access to the meadow and crop lands of southern Norton and Taunton. These included present Pine Street and two routes entailing sections of Plain and South Washington Streets, Clapp and Woodward Streets. A late 17th century road including Route 123 and South Worcester Street gave the industrial operations clustered near the southern portion of the Wading River access to potential markets in Attleboro and Taunton. The 18th century witnessed the probable establishment of a "road to Providence" (Pleasant, North Worcester, Route 123, Plain Street) and several north-south routes in northern Norton including North Worcester, Reservoir and Essex Streets.

B. Population:

No documentation of the native population. Those figures for the white community are limited. In 1765, Norton had a population of 1,942 residents. Norton's population dropped to 1,428 in 1776, largely the result of the North Precinct's incorporation as the town of Mansfield in 1775.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The only documentation of post-war native settlement was that of a single native living in the vicinity of "the home of George Lane" (1859), probably in the mid-18th century to early 19th century.

It appears Norton escaped major damage during King Philip's War probably because of good relations with King Philip. The first substantial post-war white settlement did not take place until the 1690s and the first decade of the 18th century. A primary settlement node was established at the present town center. The first meetinghouse was erected here in c. 1710 (probably vicinity of Norton Center cemetery). A secondary settlement node clustered about the Chartley and Barrowsville Ponds, an area with high industrial potential. Additional contemporary settlement occurred adjacent to Dean, Clapp, Pine, South Washington and Bay Streets. In the early-mid 18th century, two minor settlement nodes developed around two industrial complexes on the northern portion of the Rumford River. Early-late 18th century homes were built along Main and Plain Streets and to the north along North Worcester Street, Route 140, Washington, Newcomb and Newland Streets.

D. Economic Base:

No documentation of the native economy. The surviving natives probably subsisted primarily through subsistence hunting, fishing and agriculture and the sale of craft items to the white community.

Agriculture continued as the primary economic activity of Norton's settlers with an increased emphasis on commercial production. Industry underwent extensive post-war development. The focal point of the community's industry was the Wading River between Chartley Pond and the river's junction with the New York, New Haven and Harford Railroad. The Chartley Ironworks was established at the eastern end of Chartley Pond in c. 1696 (operated until c. 1790). A gristmill was erected near Barrowsville in c. 1714 by George Leonard. Prior to 1745, Jonathan Hodges constructed a fulling mill on the Goose Branch (branch of Wading River) near the junction of this stream and Dean Street, while a pre-Revolutionary War sawmill was established on the stream west of the fulling mill. A second area of considerable industrial development was the northern portion of the Rumford River. An iron forge and sawmill were established in c. 1718 at the junction of the river and Reservoir Avenue. A second forge and sawmill complex and tannery were constructed in c. 1744 and 1760, respectively, a short distance north of the junction of the river and Cross Street. Further east on the Canoe River, a grist mill and saw mill were built by William Makepeace in c. 1730. In c. 1770, an iron forge and slitting mill were established on this river a short distance south of the previously mentioned operation. James Leonard erected a sawmill

in c. 1710 (operated until c. 1845) on the Mulberry Meadow Brook northwest of the Great Rocky Hill. A tannery was built on the same brook in c. 1740 by Deacon Benjamin Copeland at the junction of the brook and Plan Street. Scattered industrial operations included a mid-18th century saw mill and a c. 1758 tannery established on Burt's Brook and a pre-1745 saw mill built near the junction of Birch Brook and East Hodges Street. Several ordinaries were licensed in the early 18th century. William Witherell was licensed to operate an ordinary in c. 1685, probably on Bay Street. Nathaniel Hodges received a liquor license in c. 1712 while a tavern was operated in the Jonathan Newcomb house a short distance south of the junction of Main and Burt Streets in the 18th century.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Norton retains almost a dozen houses of the Colonial period. The earliest of these is dated to 1697, with several other houses dated to the first quarter of the 18th century (1710, 1720, 1727). The Campbell House (c. 1697) is a two-story three-quarter plan structure with an integral lean-to; the Parsonage (c. 1710) was once a three-bay, end-chimney half-house but was later enlarged to five-bay center-chimney status. The fact that both houses were originally of less than five-bay, two-room status is an indication of the modest circumstances of the town in the early 18th century. Several other three-quarter plan houses with integral lean-tos are known in the town with examples on North Washington, Smith and Burt Streets; these probably date somewhat later than the Campbell House. Several two-room, center-chimney Colonial houses, probably dating c. 1750, are known as well on Taunton Avenue and Route 123 at the town center with at least two double-chimney Georgian houses, on Mansfield Avenue and on Plain Street. Norton is notable for the variety of roof forms used on its 18th century houses; although gable roofs predominate, at least two gable-on-hip-roof houses are known (Burt Street; North Worcester Street) along with one house (Plain Street) which may have had a double-hip or hip-with-deck roof originally. The variety of roof forms may relate to design influences from Rhode Island. In addition to its 18th century houses, Norton retains a number of cottages, with two-room center-chimney predominating, although one-room, end-chimney and three-quarter plan examples are known as well. Most of the 18th century cottages incorporate shallow end-wall overhangs and plank framing.

Institutional: Norton's first meetinghouse was built in 1710; that meetinghouse was replaced in 1753.

Observations: Norton's wealth of water sources capable of powering mill industries and substantial supply of bog iron were primary factors in the settlement's industrial development. The community's strong agricultural-industrial base facilitated the easing of economic dependence on Taunton.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Some improvement of colonial roads during this period. No Federal period turnpikes.

B. Population:

Slow population growth from 1776 (1,329) to 1820 (1,600), then declined in 1830 (1,479).

C. Settlement:

Settlement patterns during this period basically linear with some clustering at Chartley, the Center, Barrowsville, and at scattered industrial (basically mill) sites on the Canoe and Wading Rivers. Bulk of settlement consists of farmsteads.

D. Economic Base:

Active nail making continued tradition of iron operations into Federal period, ceasing only with development of nail machines. Furnace established by Annes Lincoln, 1825, at what became Norton Furnace district. (The furnace employed 25 hands in 1837.) A more dramatic growth was the rapid appearance of three small cotton mills in 1811, evidently operated by local owners, though the mill at Barrowsville was bought up by Taunton manufacturers Crocker and Richmond in the 1820s.

Crocker Brothers copper rolling mill established 1825 on Wading River, with expertise borrowed from Revere's earlier copper mill in Canton. For the following decades it was Norton's largest enterprise until it opened a larger plant at the weir district in Taunton.

Straw industry introduced c. 1802 from Wrentham via Betsy Makepeace. By 1832 large quantities of straw were grown in the town and \$5,000-\$6,000 worth of braid and straw bonnets and hats were being produced.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A few well-detailed Federal houses were built at the town center and along outlying roads, but in general Norton's Federal houses are simply detailed. Center-chimney plan houses were built in almost equal numbers with double and end-wall chimney houses with some two dozen examples known across the town. Twin rear-wall chimney houses are rare but not unknown. Only one double-pile (four-room plan) house is known (Wheaton House, 1829); that house is by far the most elaborate house in town, with a monitor hip-roof and verandas. Also known is one unusual three-bay, hip-roofed Federal house (Sweet House, c. 1810) with a pedimented, projecting, enclosed portico. In addition to the two-story houses built in the Federal period, a number of cottages, both single-family and double cottages, were built across the town. Clusters of center and end-chimney cottages are located at Chartley, at Barrowsville, at Winneconnet, on Taunton Avenue, and along North and South Washington Streets. One stone cottage is known, on Lincoln Street.

Institutional: The only institutional building known to survive from the Federal period is a story-and-a-half, side-entered school of 1801.

## VII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Taunton Branch of the Boston-Providence was run through Norton in 1853. It should be noted that the Boston-Providence's fetish for the direct route resulted in the railroad missing every village in the town, with the depot built in 1853 located a mile east of Norton Center.

### B. Population:

Slight growth from 1830 to 1840 (1545), then substantial growth in 1850 (1966). Drop in 1860 and stable to 1870. Foreign born population 284 in 1855, 238 Irish. St. Mary's Catholic mission established in 1865 at Taunton Avenue and Barrows Street. Irish population primarily in Barrowsville and Copperworks Village.

### C. Settlement:

Some new residential settlement by 1850, four villages in existence; Center the largest with 60 houses, 2 churches, a tavern, 2 stores and the Wheaton Female Seminary; Barrowsville had 25 houses, a store, a church and a cotton factory; Copperworks Village had 25 houses, the Copperworks and a store; and Winneconnet Village had 20 houses, a church, a store and a population engaged in farming.

### D. Economic Base:

Town's industrial economy increasingly concentrated in less than half a dozen mill privileges, of which the Crocker copper rolling mills and smelter was much the largest. In 1845 the company employed 60 hands and produced \$316,000 worth of copper and lead. Shortly afterwards, the company opened a plant in Taunton at the Weir and transferred some activity there. For most of the period, Lincoln's furnace ranked second in manufactured product value. In its peak census year, 1865, it employed 65 men and produced \$90,000 worth of hollowware and other castings.

The four small cotton mills were still in operation through 1845, though all but one had closed by the 1860s. At the very end of the period, in 1867, G. H. Talbot introduced wool scouring equipment at the Centre mills, said (by Hurd, p.620) to be one of only three in the country engaged in the process. (Others at Walpole and Chelmsford, Massachusetts and New Brunswick, New Jersey.)

Other small industries included a friction match business, begun by Austin Messenger, 1857, and in the same period, the Norton Straw Mfg. Co., which after repeated reorganizations, closed after seven years.

### E. Architecture:

Residential: Sidehall Greek Revival and Italianate cottages were built in some numbers during the period with clusters of such houses known at Chartley, at Winneconnet and at the town center along Route 123. The more conservative houseform of the period is the end-chimney, center-entrance cottage, examples of which in the Greek Revival style continued to be built in the town into the 1850s, to judge by the gradual inclusion in some cottages



of Italianate detailing and kneewall framing. By the 1850s, houses and cottages with asymmetrical T- and L-plans and transitional Greek Revival/Italianate detailing were being built, particularly at the town center and along Route 123. At least a few examples of an unusual Greek Revival form, with a shallow one-room deep, broad-gabled plan and either center or side-hall entrance, are known in the town, on Newcomb and on Clapp Streets. Also known are a few somewhat more ambitiously detailed Greek Revival cottages with recessed sidehall porticos or projecting verandas. Very few Italianate houses were built and only one Italianate house with the typical asymmetrical cross-gabled of the fully developed Italianate villa is known (Trinitarian Parsonage, c. 1855).

Institutional: Several important institutional structures were built in Norton in the Early Industrial period. The third meetinghouse of the first parish was built in 1836; a two-and-a-half story, Greek Revival structure with Gothic lancet windows and a short two-stage belfry, the church has awkward vertical proportions. In 1833, the Trinitarian congregation split and formed a new parish; in 1833 the original church was built but subsequent alterations (primarily those of 1882) have given the church a Romanesque Revival appearance; in 1849, a temple-front Greek Revival building was appended to the church to be used as a chapel. Other institutional buildings of the period are the original classroom building for Wheaton College (founded 1834), a well detailed two-and-a-half story Italianate building (Mary Lyon Hall, 1849) with flush-board pilastered facade, cross-gabled plan and octagonal cupola, and several small story-and-a-half Greek Revival schools built across the town c. 1850; all of the schools have three-bay center-entered plans as was typical for schools of the mid-century. Other institutions founded in the period whose buildings are not known to survive are the Methodist church (1850) and the Catholic church (1865).

Commercial: At least two commercial buildings probably dating from the Early Industrial period are known to survive; both are two-story, frame structures with three-bay facades, center-entrance plans, and transitional Greek Revival/Italianate detailing. The most notable commercial building in the town, however, is the 1853 Boston and Providence station (Richard Upjohn), a one-story brick Italianate structure with blind arches and overhanging eave supported on struts.

## IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway route not identified at this time.

### B. Population:

Population remains stable to 1900 (1,826) then sizeable growth to 1915 (2,587). Foreign born population 220 in 1885, increased to 593 in 1915. Majority swings from Irish in 1885 to Canadian in 1915.

### C. Settlement:

Some residential growth at the center during this period. Consolidation of schools in 1892 indicates bulk of settlement at Chartley, Barrowsville

and at the Center. Otherwise residential settlement remains basically linear with farmsteads representing the bulk of housing. The Center had a population of 450 in 1899. Copperworks Village known as Norton Furnace in 1899.

#### D. Economic Base:

The Attleborough and Taunton Railroad was constructed through Norton in 1869. Perhaps under this influence, the town developed a small jewelry industry, beginning in 1871, at Chartley. The only other major development identified was the establishment of the Defiance Mfg. Co. bleachery at Barrowsville, a concern incorporated in 1915, though it had located here some years earlier.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Little new construction took place at the town center; most of the houses built in the period were constructed as infill housing within established residential districts and along main roads. Clusters of late 19th-century sidehall plan cottages in the Queen Anne style were built along Route 123 west of the town center as well as at Chartley and Barrowsville. Most of these retain some Italianate detailing through the 1880s, although cottages adopting L-plans and Stick Style elements were also built. At least a few multiple-family houses were built at Barrowsville with several two-family houses and at least one Queen Anne tenement known on South Worcester Street; a few Queen Anne two-deckers were built on Route 123 at Chartley. While larger houses in the Queen Anne style are unusual, a few were built. One of these, a two-and-a-half story Queen Anne house (c. 1885) on South Worcester Street at Maple Street, was apparently once quite stylish and well detailed with half-timbered gables, stickwork and carved details. Other more substantial late 19th-century houses, most of them in the Queen Anne style (although one shingled house with Craftsman details is known on Elm Street at Cross Street), stand on North Worcester, Mansfield, and Cobb Streets as well as along Route 123 east of the town center. After the turn of the century, four-square, pyramidal hip-roofed Colonial Revival houses were built in some numbers especially at Barrowsville and as infill housing along outlying roads.

Institutional: Most of the institutional building of the period occurred at the town center. The Trinitarian church was remodelled in 1882 in the Romanesque Revival style by Worcester architect, Stephen C. Earle; Earle also designed a brick Library (1887) in the Richardsonian Romanesque style at the town center. In addition, a Queen Anne town hall was constructed in 1881. In 1875 a modest story-and-a-half Queen Anne Methodist church was built at Chartley on South Worcester Street.

Commercial: Several story-and-a-half and two-story transitional Italianate/Queen Anne stores were built at Chartley and along Route 123; the best preserved of these is Wetherell Hall (1896) on South Worcester Street.

Industrial: Well preserved industrial buildings of the period stand at Barrowsville, Chartley and on Elm Street at Cross Street. The earliest of these is a utilitarian brick factory at Chartley (1871?); the other industrial structures date later in the period with a three-story frame building on Elm Street and brick and frame buildings at Barrowsville. In addition, a Queen Anne freight shed was constructed at East Norton depot.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Mansfield-Taunton Avenue

B. Population:

Drop in population in 1920, then slow steady growth to end of period. St. Mary's builds new church at Power and Worcester Streets and becomes a parish in 1924.

C. Settlement:

Residential settlement consists primarily of infill at existing villages. Post World War II residential development at Norton Reservoir.

D. Economic Base:

Very little identified new growth. Box and jewelry manufacturers and the Defiance Bleachery remained the town's principal manufacturers.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Extensive development of very modest one-story summer cottages took place at Norton Grove in the late 'teens and 1920s. More substantial cottages were built on Taunton Avenue and West Main Street; most of these are story-and-a-half hip-roofed buildings with simple Colonial Revival detailing. Similar cottages were built on South Worcester Street. Somewhat more ambitious Colonial Revival/Craftsman cottages were built on Mansfield Avenue at the town center.

Institutional: Saint Mary's church, a well-detailed chapel with Craftsman elements was built on South Worcester and Power Streets in 1924. Also built in the period was a large brick Colonial Revival church at Wheaton College (Cole Chapel, 1917), designed by Ralph Adams Cram.

Industrial: The two-story, concrete Holm Spray factory on West Main Street at Chartley may date within the period; a modest example of Moderne architecture, it incorporates a rectilinear entrance bay with glass blocks.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

None of Norton's Late Industrial and Early Modern industrial structures have been inventoried. Also lacking are inventory forms for many late 19th-century residential structures standing in the town; existing survey concentrates on Colonial, Federal and Early Industrial residential structures. Well-preserved clusters at North Washington Street at Cobb Street (Early Industrial; Greek Revival and Italianate) and at Winnecunnet (Early to Late Industrial with some 18th-century buildings).

Industrial: The town's survey had identified several of its smaller service buildings (a paint shop, freight and railroad stations). This survey should be extended to include the wool scouring mill, the Defiance Bleachery, and the brick jewelry factory at Chartley. The latter building, on the site of Leonard's 1695 "Chartley" forge, bears further study both in its own right and for its archaeological potential. The examination of town mill sites should also be continued.

XII. SOURCES

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